PHANTOM BOOKS
ANC
CRIME ON MY HANDS
By Carl G. Hoges
No. 506
35¢
A Sensational Suspense Story
About Dope Peddlers–
Hopped Up Gunmen– Come-On Dames!
An Original Mystery—Not A Reprint

Bucking* The Outfit *was not only like bucking City Hall . . . it was bucking City Hall! But Jeff Hardy, Private Eye, had a score to settle with the paid killers who were responsible for the death of his partner, Bill Macaulay. He knew what he was dealing with—a vicious and deadly machine which had taken care of Macaulay because he possessed written evidence concerning its narcotics operations. But the killers hadn't gotten what they wanted—and Jeff knew that while the evidence was still at large, his own life was in constant jeopardy. . . . Defying* The Outfit, *flirting with constant danger—and avoiding the beautiful blonde bait that he met at every turn . . . Jeff continued his search never knowing when a slug might put an end to his relentless efforts for vengeance!

THIS IS AN ORIGINAL PHANTOM
SUSPENSE MYSTERY—NOT A REPRINT

CRIME ON MY HANDS

CRIME ON MY HANDS

by

CARL G. HODGES

HANRO CORPORATION
New York, N. Y.

COPYRIGHT, 1951, BY HANRO CORP.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, INCLUDING THE RIGHT
TO REPRODUCE THIS BOOK, OR PORTIONS
THEREOF, IN ANY FORM

All the names and characters described in this book are fictitious, and have no reference to any living person.

This is an original novel, especially written for Phantom Books.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CHAPTER ONE

THE MORGUE ATTENDANT in the white uniform took hold of the handle of the long drawer with his rubber gloves and slid it open. Lieutenant Ben Franklin of Homicide stared at me and said, "There he is. Take a look, Hardy."

I looked into the drawer. My stomach turned over.

Hal Benton's corpse was not a pretty sight. The "cooler room" of the morgue was air-conditioned but the stink of formaldehyde and disinfectant and the sight of Benton's body gave me a queasy feeling. Sweat stood out on my forehead and my shirt stuck to my hide with body perspiration.

Benton's body, under the once flattering but now soggy clothes, was bloated to twice its normal size. His hair was matted on his skull like wet seaweed. The flesh of his features was swollen. His eyes seemed ready to pop from their sockets. Streaks of raw meat showed where some pointed weapon had been raked time and again across his face. I thought of the tines of a table fork, because of the

regular spacing of the deep cuts. The face was the color of putty, the cuts that of raw liver.

Franklin's voice cut through the fog in my brain. "It isn't pretty, is it, Hardy? Looks like somebody worked his face over with a currycomb before they killed him and tossed him in the river. There were four bullets in him. Four thirty-eight slugs."

I felt wobbly. The stink of the formaldehyde got me. I'd always hated anything that smelled like ether ever since I was a kid and a schoolmate busted his arm. It wasn't set right and the doctor came to the kid's house and gave him ether and broke the damn thing over. I grabbed on to the end of the drawer and held on till the weakness passed.

Franklin said, "Look at his hands and wrists, Hardy."

I looked at Benton's hands. They were bloated and scratched. Above the right wrist, circling it, was a brutal gash. I could see the bone. The left wrist was the same, the bone exposed. Nausea hit me again.

Franklin said, "They trussed him up with wire so damn tight it cut clear to the bone." I felt his eyes boring into mine. "Then they wired concrete blocks to his feet before they threw him in the river."

I rubbed my hand over my eyes to wipe away the sweat of weakness. I turned away from the drawer. "I couldn't even swear it was Benton," I said.

Franklin made a sign to the attendant and the latter slid the drawer shut on its ball bearing rollers. Franklin said, "It's Benton, all right. All his stuff was in his pockets. The clothes are his. And his secretary described some dental work Benton had done last week in New York. Stanley described it before we ever let him see the body. We double-checked everything. It's Benton."

He took me back to Central Station in a police car and we rode the elevator up to his cubbyhole in Homicide. Franklin sat down at his desk and motioned me to a chair. I took it and put my feet up on the corner of a table. A frown crossed his craggy face. He didn't like people who put their feet on his furniture, especially private detectives.

His voice showed annoyance. "Hardy," he said, "in the first place,

when the police send for you, they want you right away; not twenty-four hours later. Not where the murder of a man like Hal Benton is concerned."

Everything Franklin said always seemed to rub me the wrong way. I said, angrily, "I didn't know Benton was dead until I got a wire from Bill Macaulay. He said Benton was dead and you wanted to see me as soon as I could get here. I left Columbus, Ohio, at ten o'clock this morning. I drove three hundred and nineteen miles in five hours. I skipped dinner because I wanted to get here in a hurry. It's July fifteenth and the thermometer hit ninety-five this afternoon. I'm hot and tired and thirsty. And I'm not in a mood to be pushed around."

Franklin said, "I'm sorry," but he didn't smile. "Mac didn't say you were out of town. I took it for granted you were in Chicago. What were you doing in Columbus, if it's any of my business?"

I didn't smile, either. "It isn't. But I was tracing a skip. A guy that skipped town owing one of the State Street stores for a house full of furniture. Macaulay and Hardy do a lot of that sort of thing. We don't have to worry about murder and rape and dope. Ours is a nice clean business."

"Like divorce frame-ups?"

The man had a genius for making me sore. "We don't handle bedroom stuff. And you know it." I gave him a stare as cold as his own. "Why all the window dressing? Why did you take me to the morgue? What about Benton? Why did you send for me?"

Franklin wouldn't be hurried. He wanted to pump me first. "When did you go to Columbus?"

"Early Monday morning."

"Where did you stay?"

"At the Forty Winks Motel."

He wrote the name down and then asked me the address. I said I didn't know but it was on U. S. 50 at the east end of Columbus. He wrote that down, too.

I said, "Holy Cow! You don't think I killed him, do you?"

His expression didn't change. "We check everybody. We don't take anything for granted." He picked up the slip of paper on which

he had written the information about the Forty Winks and put it in a file folder. "You could have killed him, you know. His body was thrown into the river either late Sunday night or very early Monday morning. Not long after a party broke up on a cabin cruiser moored off Jackson Boulevard." He pulled the file folder toward him and thumbed through some sheets of paper. "The cabin cruiser is called the *Osiris*. It's owned by Jerome Warsaw." He lifted his gray head and his eyes seemed to be boring into my brain. "We know you were a guest at the party on the *Osiris* Sunday night, Hardy."

"Sure, I was. Hal Benton invited me."

"Wasn't that a little unusual for Benton to invite you to a party on somebody else's boat?"

I laughed. "If you knew Hal Benton you wouldn't think it was unusual. One of the uninhibited guys of the world. One of the friendliest. He had a lot of money. He threw a lot of business in Warsaw's lap and he probably thought Warsaw wouldn't object to an extra guest."

Franklin suddenly switched his thinking. "How long have you known Benton?"

I thought back before I answered. "Since 1943. We were in the Marines together. He was a buck private in my outfit. He was the lonesomest guy in the South Pacific. He didn't have any folks or any friends—never even answered mail call because he knew he wouldn't get any letters. I used to let him read some of my letters just so he'd have a feeling he was hearing from somebody back in the States. He liked me and I liked him. You get that way after you duck the same bullets for a couple of years."

"Wait a minute. You said Benton was the friendliest guy in the world. Now you say he had no friends and didn't even answer mail call. That don't add up, Hardy."

I said, "That was back in '43. After we were mustered out I came back to Chicago and went in as Bill Macaulay's partner. I never saw or heard of Benton until 1948. One day the Giants came to Wrigley Field and I sat on the first base line because I'm a Giant fan."

Franklin gave me a dirty look, like he thought I was a traitor to

the Cubs and White Sox; rooting for the Giants and living in Chicago.

I went on. "Hal Benton was there, surrounded by a box full of friends. He was a different guy from the one I'd known in the service. He'd turned into the friendliest guy in the world. Always laughing. Always making wisecracks. The people around him were evidently all his guests. They looked like the kind of leeches that money always attracts. He was a generous guy, you know, especially where dames were concerned.

"Now, Hal Benton had money, plenty of it. After he got out of service he started writing scripts for comic books. Then he got into publishing them and one of them turned into a big hit and he started in coining money. Anyhow, we met again that day and we had a big gabfest. Ever since then, whenever Hal hit town he'd give me a ring and we'd get together for a few hours and a few drinks. In the summer, maybe we'd take in a ball game at Wrigley Field. If it was winter, we'd sometimes go over to the Sherman Hotel and bowl a few lines. He was nuts about bowling; pretty good at it, too. He held about a 190 average. Last year he landed high in the singles at the A B C.

"A lot of guys and a lot of women always tagged after Hal because he had a lot of money and he liked to spend it. I liked the guy for himself. When you duck bullets together for a couple of years, money don't mean much. Hal was a right guy."

"How'd you get together Sunday?"

"He phoned me at my place. I met him in the lobby of the Sherman and we drove down to the lake front. A launch picked us up there and took us out to the *Osiris*. The boat was jammed with people. I met most of them but I only remember a few names. Syl Stanley, Benton's secretary. He's a C.P.A. He's been with Hal since he started the comic book business. There was Jerome Warsaw, who owns the *Osiris* and runs a printing plant out on the west side. He prints all Benton's comic books. That's how they became friends. And Ella Granger. She's one of the many blondes that happened to catch Hal's eye. I'm not sure but I think she's a stenographer or something at the Peerless Awning Company when she's not being a party girl. But I wouldn't know."

Franklin's expression was close to a sneer. "Do you think Benton got all his money out of comic books?"

"I don't know how much money he got—or had. And I don't know whether he got it out of comic books. If you're trying to prove that Benton had some other source of income, I'm afraid I can't help you. All I know is he was a right guy. I don't think he had an enemy in the world."

"He had one. The guy that put four bullets in him and cut the hell out of his face and bound him so tight with wire it cut an inch deep into his hide and then tied two chunks of concrete to his body and dumped it in the river. Whoever did the job hated him plenty."

I was still a little woozy. After you've shared a fox hole with a guy and ducked bullets whizzing around your ears like flies, it's tough to se him end up a bloated corpse. "Are you sure it was Benton?"

"Yeah. Everything was still in his pockets."

"But his face was mutilated and his body was in the river three days and..."

"The inquest was at two this afternoon. Stanley described the fillings in Benton's teeth before he ever viewed the body. There's no question about it. The body was Benton's."

I said, "You're travelling up a blind alley?"

"So far. I've talked to Stanley and Warsaw and the blonde girl. They're in the clear as far as we can tell. Stanley wouldn't have killed the goose that laid the golden eggs. He had a soft job and he'd want to keep it. Ditto for Warsaw. The comic book printing contract was Warsaw's bread and butter. *Unless* Benton was figuring on taking the contract away from Warsaw. However, both Warsaw and Stanley say he wasn't."

"That don't add up," I said. "Warsaw might go berserk enough to kill but the mutilated face and the wire and the concrete blocks don't sound like Warsaw. He's a kind of picayunish guy. He'd probably faint if he stuck his finger."

"That would leave out the girl, too. The killing was a man's job."

I had an inspiration. "If the Granger girl had a boy friend, he might have blown his top when Benton infringed on his territory.

Especially if he were a hop head or a marijuana puffer. The mutilation, the wire, might add up to a double-crossed sweetheart."

Franklin pursed his lips and his round face made him resemble his famous namesake, Benjamin Franklin. "All but the concrete blocks tied to the body. A boy friend would want the body found. He'd want it found so he could read about it in the papers and gloat over it. Whoever bumped Benton didn't want his body found.

"A diver making a periodical inspection of bridge foundations stumbled over it and brought it up. Pure accident. The funny part, the diver was supposed to make the inspection last week but he got sick and didn't get to do it till yesterday." Then the guy blushed when he said, "Reminds me of what the guy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* said, 'For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak with most miraculous organ'."

Most of the guys at Central Station would have died laughing if they had heard Franklin quoting Shakespeare. Not me. I began to like Franklin a little more because I agree that the old bard had a lot on the ball. I own a twelve-volume set that includes everything Shakespeare ever wrote.

Franklin said, "As far as we can find out, Benton left no heirs. No wife, no family. No relatives at all."

Hal had never talked to me about personal stuff; not even in the service. I told Franklin as much.

It was nearly four o'clock when I left the Central Station on South State Street and drove over to Wabash and up under the L and then cut over to Dearborn, where Bill Macaulay and I had our offices on the second floor over *Barney's*. I parked the car behind the building and went in the back door of *Barney's* and put away some French fries and a steak about two inches thick. I hadn't eaten anything since breakfast in Columbus and I felt a lot better.

I went out the side door of *Barney's* into the lobby and climbed the stairway to the second floor. Our office was the last one on the right and I always got a bang out of reading the sign on the frosted glass: MACAULAY AND HARDY: *Investigations.*

The outer office was empty when I entered but I heard voices in the private office in the back. Then Bill Macaulay poked his head around the door and gave me a big grin. "Hi, Jeff! Did you see

Franklin? He's been phoning me every hour on the hour. I could set my watch by his calls."

I said "Yeah" and walked across the office and shook hands with him. His fingers were stubby and thick and he had a grip that made me wince. He got a kick out of that bone-crushing handshake of his.

Bill was about fifty-five; just twice as old as I was but he still had plenty of pep. He enjoyed just being alive. His hair was still brown with a patch of gray at the left temple. He was six feet tall and weighed two hundred pounds and not one ounce of it was fat.

He'd been a detective on the Racket Squad for twelve years but got railroaded off the force when the ward heelers framed a Civil Service hearing on him. But he still loved all cops. He had one obsession. He blamed The Outfit for getting him off the force and he wanted to get even. His ambition was to pin all the responsibility for crime and corruption in Chicago on the shoulders of Clem Dorish, reputed head of The Outfit, who had stepped into Al Capone's shoes. He was rough and tough and as honest as they come. I was proud that he'd taken me in as a partner when his agency got more business than he could handle alone. My own dad was dead and I regarded Mac more or less as a second father. That's what I thought of him.

I followed him into the private office and saw the owner of the second voice. She was sitting in Bill's own swivel chair—something he'd never let anybody else do. She had golden-brown hair that tumbled down on the shoulders of a white silk blouse that was comfortably filled where a blouse should be filled. Her skirt was a dirndl affair with a ruffle around her slender waist. She had her legs crossed but she uncrossed them when my eyes started popping out of their sockets. She got red in the face and then she laughed. It was a tinkling, happy laugh that made a thrill run up and down my spine.

She had the face of a choir singer on the body of a swimming champion. She was pretty enough to pose for a picture on the calendar above Bill's desk; one that showed a different beautiful girl on the page for each month. She was prettier than the naked girl on *July*, who was filling a little bucket with sand from the beach.

Macaulay saw my eyes bugging out and he grinned. "Jeff, this

is Miss Conroy—Betty Conroy. Miss Conroy, I'd like you to meet my not-so-silent partner, Jeff Hardy."

She got up like a queen getting off her throne and put her hand in mine. I looked into her eyes and got lost. I forgot I was holding her hand. Then she tugged a little and I let go. I was about to utter some old cliche about "How long have you been hiding from me" when I saw the *Tribune* on the table. Shock swept over me.

I grabbed it up. The banner headline said: NY COMIC BOOK PUBLISHER SLAIN. But that wasn't what had drawn my eye and crystallized my fear. Halfway down, in the middle of the front page, was a two-column head that said: MACAULAY AND BRENNAN TO TESTIFY BEFORE CRIME COMMITTEE TOMORROW.

The first paragraph carried all the meat; all the words that were needed to send fear into my spine. I read them quickly.

Former Racket Lieutenant Wm. Macaulay, one of Chicago's better-known "private eyes", and long an outspoken critic of the tie-up between officialdom and organized crime in Chicago, has been subpoenaed by the Crime Committee and will testify before that body at a secret hearing at two p.m. Friday, Committee Chairman Dwight Oliver announced today.

The rest of the story went on to say that Macaulay had volunteered to testify and reveal the findings of private investigations he had conducted on his own since his own summary dismissal from the police department. It hinted that Macaulay's testimony would involve a state representative, several ward politicians and police officials in a tie-up with organized crime in the city. The final paragraph said that Mel Brennan, one-time mouthpiece for Clem Dorish, present head of The Outfit, had also volunteered to testify. I didn't know Brennan and I forgot all about him.

I forgot Miss Conroy. I stared at Bill. "Have you gone completely nuts? Are you setting yourself up as a one-man band to fight guys like Clem Dorish and the rest of The Outfit? They've got this town by the tail—gambling, prostitution, dope. They're not going to sit still while you spill your guts to the Crime Committee and spoil their little playhouse. They make millions a year out of crime and they won't let one ex-cop spoil their take."

Macaulay looked at me like Nathan Hale must have looked that

terrible day. "I've got evidence enough to make some big heads roll, Jeff. The Outfit's been running things too long. The only reason they can run things is because some of the guys who collect salary from the taxpayers got their paws in the easy dough from The Outfit. I'm just an ex-cop, Jeff, but I'm an American, too. Anything I can do to put those rats in jail, I'm going to do!"

I threw the *Tribune* back on the table. "From now on, whenever you walk out of this office, you better have your gun under your left arm. The Outfit got you off the force and they won't hesitate at anything to keep your mouth shut."

Macaulay gave me that grin of his, and he turned to face Miss Conroy as if he wanted her to hear his words. "Killing me won't solve their problem, Jeff, and they know it. They know that if they bump me off, the evidence I've collected is still here."

I said, like I was pleading with my own father, "Carry a gun, Bill. That's all I ask. Just carry a gun."

CHAPTER TWO

MISS CONROY got up then and said her pretty good-byes and went out of the office. It wasn't till then that I realized that I didn't know who she really was, or how Macaulay had come to know her; and what had been her reason for visiting the office.

I didn't have a chance to ask Macaulay. He put his shoulder holster on over his sweat-damp shirt and then put his blue double-breasted on with a grimace. "I'll be back in ten minutes, Jeff. I'm going down to the *Bowl* to pick up a bowling bag."

I said, "This is Thursday. You don't bowl at the Arcade till tomorrow night."

He grinned. "I might want to knock over a few big pins," he said, and walked out of the office.

I spent about ten minutes writing a brief report of the skip tracing job I'd done in Columbus. The fan on top of the desk only stirred hot air through the office and made my hand stick to the paper as I wrote. When I finished, I went downstairs. A tall, cool one with Macaulay at the *Bowl's* cocktail lounge would set pretty good.

When I got out on the sidewalk Bill Macaulay was coming up the sidewalk from the *Bowl,* a leather bowling bag swinging at his side.

I walked down to meet him. When I was about thirty feet away he seemed to stumble over something on the sidewalk. His knees bent forward and he thrust his hands forward to catch himself. It wasn't until then that I heard the reports of the guns and I saw Macaulay clutching his belly. There was an expression of agonized pain on his face.

Then I saw the two men running toward him from the rear. They had guns in their hands. The guns were jerking. Noise was rocketing in the streets and people were screaming and rushing for the cover of doorways.

I jerked my own gun and squeezed the trigger at one of the hoods. The two gunmen stopped, as if surprised at something not in the script. They ducked into the street between two cars. One of my

bullets smashed a car window and sent glass splinters into a white face.

One of the men uttered a mumbling, stuttering curse. There was the roar of a car engine, double-parked. The car leaped forward as the two hoods dove into the back seat. They raced past me before I could get into the street and use my gun. They rocketed around the corner before I could catch the license number.

The sidewalk was bedlam. A ring of spectators was gathering around Bill Macaulay's body. I rammed through them. He lay face down on the concrete, one arm pinned under him. His other hand clutched the handle of the bowling bag like it was made of gold and precious stones.

I knelt down and turned his body over as gently as I could. His hand was holding his belly and blood seeped between his fingers and soaked into his pants.

I sucked in my breath. I heard a crazy sobbing and then realized that the sobs were bubbling out of my own mouth. Bill opened his eyes and terrific pain made him close them again. He squeezed his belly and more blood ran.

I tried to call his name but I couldn't. I was all choked up inside. I finally managed to whisper. "Mac!"

He opened his eyes. He smiled at me. His eyes were clear of pain and a smile warmed his face. His lips moved and a faint sound came out. A thin trickle of red stained his mouth corners. I leaned over close to catch his words. He was saying "Mainline speedball" over and over. He gave a big sigh of relief.

Then he died in my arms.

The police cars came up Dearborn with screaming sirens. Crowds of office workers on the way home stopped to get a look at the body on the sidewalk; pin boys from the *Bowl* came out in a swarm, and night shift workers at the upstairs plant of the Peerless Awning Company swelled the crowd. People in the neighborhood who had known and loved Bill stood around; not wanting to look at his dead body but morbid curiosity forcing them to stare like the rest.

There were two cops in uniform and half a dozen men in plain clothes. Lieutenant Ben Franklin shouldered his grim way through the crowd, orders barking out of his mouth. The cops and the plain-clothesmen moved to obey.

A rope was quickly stretched between a store front and a car

at the curb. Twenty feet further down the sidewalk another rope was stretched in similar fashion. Spectators thought it was a clever way to prevent additions to the crowd around the body. But the cops guarding the rope, in addition to refusing to let anybody come inside the ropes, also refused to let anybody out. The plainclothesmen went to work in the crowd, asking questions, getting names and addresses of witnesses in their little books. They seemed bored with it all, like census takers working the last block before quitting for the day.

Franklin came over to me. He put sympathy into his words but he was working at his job at the same time. "How much did you see?"

My anger spilled out of me. "I saw the bums gun him! There were two hoods; another in the getaway car. I took some pot shots."

He said, "Go up to your office and wait. I'll see you later."

I objected. He didn't pay any attention. He made a motion to one of the detectives and this guy took my elbow and led me away. He took me to the rope and signalled to the cop to drop it. I stepped over it and the cop raised it again.

I went up to the office. The sign on the door didn't give me a thrill any more. *Macaulay and Hardy*. My partner was dead. A silent partner. The man I'd loved like a father was dead. I sat down at the desk and then got up and walked around the room because I couldn't bear to look at Bill's empty chair. I could still see him sitting in it. He was dead, but the memory of him would always be as much a part of the office as the furniture.

I heard the scream of another siren in the street and the clamor of the people grew in volume. I knew the ambulance had come. Bill Macaulay was taking his second last ride. To the morgue. A cold stone slab. Then a refrigerated drawer. Later the cemetery.

The shock hit me. All this time I'd been moving in a daze—aware that Bill had been shot down, but somehow not comprehending the finality of his death. He wouldn't sit in that chair any more; he wouldn't look at the girl on his calendar; he wouldn't ever give me that grin. At the awfulness of that realization, my nerves went haywire and I started shaking all over.

I got a bottle and a glass out of the bottom drawer of a file cabinet. It was a fifth of Ambassador that we kept handy. It was almost full. Bill and I had had a drink out of it Monday morning before I'd left for Columbus. I carried the glass over to the little ice-

box in the corner. I opened the ice compartment and picked up the ice pick and chipped off some ice and put it in the glass. I poured liquor over it and then added some water from the lavatory tap. I'd put three fingers in the bottom and the stuff still tasted like water. But my body stopped its shaking.

I went back to the icebox. We were always forgetting to empty the drip pan. I'd wondered if Bill had remembered to empty it while I'd been away. The pan wasn't very big; it covered only about half the space under the box behind the little swinging board. Bill had occasionally put his bowling bag in the extra space, rather than take it back to the *Bowl*. When he'd had a bad night on the alleys I usually blamed it on keeping the ball under the icebox. He'd always got a laugh out of that.

The pan was damn near full. I emptied it into the lavatory and then put it back. I went back to the table. This time I didn't bother with the glass or with ice. I drank from the bottle, until the level dropped a couple of inches.

Lieutenant Franklin came into the room. He was carrying Mac's bowling bag. That set me to shivering again. I'd given that bag to Macaulay for Christmas just seven months before. I'd typed the little card with his name on it and put it in the leather tag on the handle. I grabbed the bottle and took another long pull.

Franklin put the bag down on the floor and sat down in Bill's chair. He looked tired and worn. I put the bottle down and said, "Get the hell out of that chair! It was Bill's. Nobody sits in it from here on."

Franklin said, "You're drunk, Hardy. That won't help matters." But he got out of the chair and put his thigh on the edge of the table. "What you got to tell me? According to the guys on the street the killers were either short or tall, fat or skinny, blond or brunet, young or old. The getaway car was definitely a Buick, a Ford, a Chevvy or a Pontiac. Nobody got the license number. They're a damned helpful bunch."

I said, "There were two hoods. One was medium height, about a hundred-fifty pounds. Dark. Baby-faced and young. Maybe twenty-five or thirty but the kind of guy that don't have to shave too often. Blue suit. Double-breasted. The other guy was shorter but heavier —maybe a hundred seventy-five. He wore light slacks and a dark coat. He was older—around forty. He stuttered. He hollered when I started shooting and he didn't even holler plain. The guy in the

car I didn't see, except that he didn't wear a coat. I didn't get the license number. They beat it too fast."

Franklin moved his feet like they were tired. "We got no more reason to go for your description than the others."

I said, "Dammit, I've been trained to remember what I see. You forget I was a cop before the war, as well as afterwards, until I got sick of the hours and the poor pay, and joined up with Macaulay." I was beginning to feel warm again and my words were tripping over each other. The liquor had hit bottom and was working on me. And Franklin was beginning to gripe my soul.

I said, "You've got a slimy opinion of private eyes, I know, but . ."

He stopped me. He was too tired to argue with me. "From what I can learn, Hardy, Mac got it by mistake. I'm sorry, but that's the way it adds up."

I stared at him. His face looked fuzzy. He looked stupid. I felt smart as hell. "What are you driving at? By mistake?"

"It seems like the guy that runs the Peerless Awning Company usually brings in his cash payroll—this is July 15th—so he can pay off the day shift quitting and the night shift coming on at the same time. He usually carries the dough in a bowling bag. The killers had the joint cased and they thought Macaulay was the awning guy with the payroll."

"Malarkey!" I said, and pointed to the *Tribune* that was still on the table. "If they were after the bowling bag why did they shoot Mac down and then run without the bowling bag? They weren't after any payroll and they weren't after any bowling bag. They were out to kill Mac. The Outfit's behind this. Clem Dorish and The Outfit. They didn't want Mac to appear before the Crime Committee. They shut him up with bullets."

Franklin sighed wearily. "It's always The Outfit. No matter what happens, it's always The Outfit."

I was stubborn. "The Outfit rubbed Mac out."

"Proof?"

"Mac talked to me before he died. All he said was 'mainline speedball.' Over and over. Does that mean anything to you?"

Franklin got up off his thigh and his gray eyes came to life. "Sure. A mainline speedball is a cap of heroin injected intravenously." His voice was almost a whisper. "You think Macaulay had a tip on the narcotics racket? You think that's what he was going to spill to the Crime Committee?"

"All I know is a mainline speedball is dope and The Outfit is knee-deep in the narcotics racket. That adds up good enough for me. The Outfit bumped Mac off."

Franklin thought that over awhile. Then he said, "Macaulay wouldn't carry proof around in his head. He must have put it down in black and white somewhere. Maybe we better give the office a onceover. He might have hidden his stuff here."

We went over the offices from floor to ceiling but at the end of an hour we had found nothing that didn't have to do with the routine business of *Macaulay and Hardy*. We gave it up.

I put Macaulay's bowling bag under the icebox beside the drip pan and dropped the swinging board over it. Then I locked up the office and Franklin and I walked down the stairs to the street.

Passersby walked slowly. They'd heard the news on their radios and their eyes searched the sidewalk for blood or other evidence that a man had died there. They seemed disappointed.

Franklin said, "We took Mac's personal things down to headquarters. We'll turn 'em over to you in a couple days—or to the heirs." He took a little book out of his pocket and consulted a page. "Bertha Macaulay is the next of kin according to the card in his billfold. Austin, Texas. We'll notify her. She'll want to make the funeral arrangements, I guess."

I nodded. "That's his daughter. She's some kind of a consultant to a board of education down there. She's about twenty-five, I think. I've never met her; never even seen her picture. Mac was proud of her. She was all he had; his wife died about twelve years ago."

Franklin put the book back in his pocket. He looked a little embarrassed as he put out his hand to me. "We'll work on this, Hardy. But don't you go off half-cocked. This is a murder case. Don't mess around with it. It's for the cops to handle. I know how you feel. But if The Outfit is behind this, you can't lick 'em all by yourself."

I didn't promise to keep my hands off. I got out of committing myself by saying, "Do you think Mac's killing could be tied up in the same bundle with the murder of Hal Benton?"

"A comic book publisher and a private eye? I don't know."

Franklin was a smart cop in his own way. He wasn't the kind to stick his neck out on anything before he had something solid to go on.

He got into a police car and I went through *Barney's* and out the back door to my parked car. I got in and drove through the Loop

over to my place on the near North Side. It's on the second floor of a three-story apartment building on Grand near LaSalle. I parked the car behind the building and cut through the gangway to the street. I climbed the stairs to the second floor and went down the carpeted hall toward my apartment.

I was putting the key in the lock when my ears caught a slithering sound on the carpet. I turned around at the same time the door swung open under my hand. Coming across the hall from the still swinging door of the linen closet was one of the zaniest characters I had ever seen.

CHAPTER THREE

HE HAD THE BIGGEST HEAD and the smallest feet of any human being I had ever seen. His body was compact and as muscular as a boxer's. He wore a blue beret atop his black, coarse hair. Sideburns reached halfway down the line of his pointed jaw. He had a moustache as thin as a pencil line on his upper lip.

His skin was bronzed, as if he were part Haitian or Puerto Rican or Mexican. He wore a yellow sport shirt open at the throat to reveal an absolutely hairless chest. His slacks were scarlet and so full on his legs that I thought he could take a step or two without making his pants move. A gold chain was looped from his belt and disappeared into his left pants pocket by way of his knees. Blue suede shoes covered his tiny feet. They were so small you couldn't see them, except in flashes. Otherwise he seemed to walk on the cuffs of his slacks.

His appearance was striking, if discordant. Mostly it was the atmosphere he created. He had feline motions like a creature of the jungle. His eyes were coal black and they held a bird-like glitter that was menacing. The only thing missing in his get-up was a "stick" of marijuana that had put that glitter in his eyes.

He came up to me and touched my arm. His voice was soft and slurred and it held a tone of menace. He spoke with a soft accent that I had never heard before, a mixture of Dixie and French. He didn't ask me. He told me. Arrogantly. "You are Jeff Hardy."

I reached around the door jamb and flicked on the light in my place before I answered. "I am. Who are you?"

He looked into my living room. His teeth flashed in his dark features. "You got a phone. I'm going to use it."

"Not so damn fast," I said. "I don't even know you."

He didn't bother to answer. He brushed past me before I could stop him and crossed over to the telephone on the end table by the

davenport. He dialed quickly. Then he told his unseen listener, "I can't make it for a half hour yet."

I watched him, my eyes searching for bulges in his clothes that would advertise a knife or gun. I saw none. He came across the room toward me and lifted one of his tiny feet and kicked the door shut.

The glitter flared in his eyes and his left hand slid into his pants pocket. His voice stayed low and soft. "I got a message for you, Hardy. A message from a big man." It sounded like "beeg" when he said it.

I sucked in my breath. "A big man? You mean from The Outfit? Clem Dorish?"

A feline smile played around his mouth corners. That accent again. "You try to make me say names I do not know. I come to tell you the big man wants *eet* back. Quick."

He was talking in riddles. "It? You must have me mixed up with somebody else, Buster. I don't know what you're talking about."

The voice slurred. "The big man said you were a smart one. To tell you if you are too smart you will die. Like this." He extended one hand and made a noise as if he were a teen-ager playing Hopalong Cassidy. "Or like this." He raked his finger across his throat. He gave me that feline smile. It put butterflies in my belly.

I reached for the door. "Get out! I don't like your Easter egg getup and I don't like you. You got me mixed up with somebody else."

The smile was more deadly. "I theenk not. You are a partner of Macaulay. He died because he talked too much. You will die, too, unless you give *eet* back."

He withdrew his left hand from his pants pocket. I had my eyes glued on that hand. Watching for a knife. That's why I didn't see his right hand.

He sprang forward. His right fist exploded against my chin. He had the kick of a mule. My jaws slammed back on their hinges and pain stabbed through both ears. I staggered backward. I tried to recover my balance but my feet wouldn't get under me. My rump hit the floor and my head went down hard. My skull cracked into a leg of the davenport. Pinwheels spun in my brain and everything

in the room looked fuzzy. I heard the fading noise of an evil laugh and a slamming door. Then I passed out.

The first thing I heard was a buzzing. It started, then stopped, then started again. My brain was trying to wake my body, trying to identify the sound. All it managed was to intensify that painful buzzing that seemed to be concentrated back of my ears. I fought to open my eyes. For a long moment all I could see was the pattern of my carpet. Then I saw something that fascinated my brain.

Directly in front of me on the carpet was a cylindrical package. It was about three inches long and about an inch in diameter. My eyes couldn't focus well enough to read the printing on it. I struggled to move my hand forward and closed my fist around it.

After a long time I staggered to my feet. Weakness made me wobble to the doorway in the bathroom. When the weakness left me I went back and retrieved my hat from the floor and put it on my head. That intermittent buzzing was still a puzzle to my brain.

Now I could focus my eyes on the cylindrical object. It was wrapped in brown paper, with the ends neatly tucked in. The printing showed it was a two-dollar roll of nickels and it bore the name of a bank. Clasped inside the fist of my late assailant the roll of nickels had given him the kick of a bulldozer; it was as effective as a pair of brass knucks. I dropped the roll of nickels in my coat pocket.

For the first time I became aware of the disarray of the room. The drawer of the desk had been pulled out and tossed on the carpet and papers littered the floor. In the bedroom the drawers of the dresser had been stripped of all my clothes and they were tossed in a heap on the bed. The closets had been searched; even my suitcases had been opened. My caller had done a quick and expert job of searching the place while I was unconscious. Nothing was missing. He hadn't found what he was looking for. Macaulay's evidence.

I went into the bathroom and turned on the light. The glare punished my eyes. I looked into the cabinet mirror. I saw two hazel eyes, a gaunt face with a puffy bruise on the corner of my jaw, and a hat fringed with crisp red hair. I felt the bruise on my jaw and then favored myself with a wry grin. I wasn't going to die. I got a little bottle of mercurochrome out of the cabinet and dabbed a little

on the bruise. It stung like the devil. And that intermittent buzzing still bothered me.

Then the cobwebs swept out of my brain and my thinking was clear again. The buzzing was the sound of my telephone.

I ran into the living room and grabbed the instrument. I said, "Hardy."

A voice that dripped honey and sweetness and all the sexual lure of Eve came over the wire. "Darling, were you taking a bath?"

I said, "You must have the wrong number, baby."

"You don't even remember me? Shame on you. After all the nice things you said."

An idea began to swirl in my brain and I wanted to get rid of her. "Listen, I haven't got time. Call me back." I made a move to hang up the phone.

Her voice trailed out of it and I didn't hang up. Because she said, "This is Ella. Ella Granger."

I took a long breath. This was the blonde I had met on the *Osiris* the last time I'd seen Hal Benton alive. This was the blonde that worked for the Peerless Awning Company, in front of which Bill Macaulay was murdered.

"So what?"

"Why don't you come over? We can talk. Among other things."

That might be a good idea. I'd met her Sunday night and Hal Benton ended up in the river. Thursday afternoon my partner was murdered and she wanted to talk. Maybe there was a connection. It was worth a try. I said, "I'll be there in an hour." She gave me the address and I hung up.

I ran to the door and down the stairway. I cut through the gangway to the back of the building and got into my car. I wheeled into Grand and turned south on LaSalle. I hit the first signal light right and had luck all the way downtown. I turned left when I hit Jackson Boulevard at the Board of Trade building and then cut over to Dearborn.

I found a parking place half a block away from the office and ran up the sidewalk. I took the stairs two at a time and dashed down the hall. The minute I reached the door of the office I knew

I was too late. The door was locked but there were light-colored marks in the side of the door jamb where somebody had used a jimmy.

I unlocked the door and flicked on the light switch. The reception office didn't look any different than it ever did. There wasn't anything in it anybody would be interested in; only a long oak table and some stiff-looking leather-covered chairs sitting on an Axminster rug.

The private office looked like the tail end of a cyclone had whipped through it. Every drawer in the desk had been pulled out and papers littered the floor. The file cabinets had been jimmied by an expert and file folders and correspondence were everywhere. The icebox door was hanging open. The searcher had taken time to punch holes in a can of beer with the ice pick to have refreshment at my expense. The can lay on the floor and beer had trickled out on the floor. The only thing that remained undisturbed was the naked girl on the calendar above Mac's desk. The naked lady who was supposed to represent July.

She was as calm and undisturbed as ever. She had seen everything, knew everything, but she wasn't saying anything. What wouldn't I give to hear that sweet little lady's story. If she were only a talking picture.

I lifted the swinging board under the icebox where the drip pan was. The drip pan was still there. So was the bowling bag. The boys had evidently overlooked this obvious hiding place. It was not very bright of them, nor were they very thorough.

I pulled it out and zipped open the top of the bag with a queer sense of expectation driving me. I lifted out the ball. I rammed my fingers down in both finger holes and in the thumb hole. I put the ball on the floor and then turned my attention to the bag. It didn't have anything hidden in it and it didn't have a false bottom. This was a bitter disappointment.

I put the ball back in the bag and shoved the thing under the swinging board of the icebox that hid the drip pan. Then I got up and grabbed the telephone. I dialed the Central Station and asked for Lieutenant Ben Franklin. In a moment he came on. He sounded tired.

I said, "Macaulay did have something The Outfit wanted. They cleaned out the office. If what those guys wanted was here, they got it."

Franklin wanted the details. I gave them. "A zoot-suited character came to my apartment with a message from a 'big man'. Before he gave me the message he used my phone to tell somebody that he couldn't meet them for half an hour. I figured he was phoning to somebody to tell them that he had me nailed down for half an hour and it would be okay to give the office the once-over. Then he told me the big man wanted something back and, if he didn't get it, I'd die. Then he slugged me. I came over to the office as fast as I could get here but I was too late."

Franklin was quick. His voice was tight. "How about the bowling ball?"

"That's about the only thing they didn't find. But there's no soap. There wasn't anything hidden in the bowling ball; nothing in the bag. I thought maybe Mac had cached some evidence in the finger holes, too, but he didn't."

Franklin said, "What did this little muscle guy in the crazy get-up look like?"

"A juvenile delinquent grown up. Big head, little feet. Accent. Wore a blue beret, yellow shirt, red pants, blue shoes. You couldn't believe it unless you saw it.

"It sounds like Elio. I think he's one of The Outfit boys, all right. Hangs around South State and Cottage Grove. We had him in Rackets as a numbers' runner. Narcotics had him tabbed for peddling marijuana last year. Maybe he's the guy. I'll have the boys bring him in and we'll ask him some questions and then kick his teeth in, just for luck."

I said, "Elio? That his first name or his last?"

"The only one he's got. Just Elio. He doesn't need any more than that."

I said, "I got more news. I got a honeyed invitation from Ella Granger to pay her a call."

"Granger? That the gal that was on the *Osiris*?"

"It is. And also the gal that works for the Peerless Awning Company. She wants to talk."

"About what?"

"I don't know. But I think I'll go and listen."

Franklin sounded like a human being. "Let me know how it turns out."

CHAPTER FOUR

I HAD TO PARK on Ohio Street because I couldn't find a spot on North Clark. Then I walked around the corner to North Clark to hunt the address Ella Granger had given me.

An old derelict with rheumy eyes padded up to me, his dirty paw outstretched. "Mister, I ain't had nothin' to eat since yestiddy." His breath smelled like a brewery and the trickle of chewing tobacco was matted in his stubble. I gave him a quarter and he padded away. He evidently couldn't see the restaurant across the street because he headed straight for the tavern on the corner.

I cut across th street in the glare of the neon signs on the front of the "All-Girl" Casino. I wondered if some of the other joints featured "part-girls". I passed a bookstore and turned into the doorway next to it. The stairway was dirty and narrow and its users had scrawled obscenities on the plaster. I went up quickly, guided by the electric bulb hanging from a wire at the head of the stairs.

The first door was the one I wanted. A typewritten card was fastened to the panel with a thumb tack. *Miss Ella Granger.*

I used my knuckles on the door. After a minute it was jerked open. Ella Granger stood in the doorway. One hand held the door knob; the other a tall glass with an amber fluid and ice cubes that made a friendly sound. Her hair cascaded down over the shoulders of a Chinese robe that was very casually tied at the waist.

Her lips moved but no sound came out. She peered at me as if she were having trouble seeing me. Then I realized that she was a little drunk. She said, "What the hell do you want, Buster?"

I was momentarily nonplussed. I couldn't keep my eyes off the gap in the robe. It made a long V from her throat to her flat stomach. All of it was creamy flesh.

Suddenly her blue eyes showed that they recognized me. She uttered a bubbly laugh and took her hand off the doorknob. "Well, if it ain't Handsome! Come on in."

Ella Granger's apartment made me blink. Although it was in the heart of Honky-tonk, U.S.A., there was no trace of North Clark Street environment.

The living room was immense. It extended the full width of the building and was twenty feet long. Blood-red broadloom carpeted the floor; gold draw drapes masked the windows. The walls were four shades of gray, ranging from dark to nearly white. The blue ceiling was recessed, with indirect lighting. Silver stars were sprinkled on that background.

Occasional chairs in contrasting colors; a television set and a record-radio combination were placed around the room. The attention-catcher was the davenport.

It was seven feet long and four feet wide and its bulk was upholstered in chartreuse frieze. Half a dozen silk pillows of red and gray were tossed on its cushions. In front of it was a coffee table that held a cigarette box, a decanter and glasses and a bucket of ice cubes. Behind the davenport, on a built-in ledge, was an array of china bric-a-brac and a table lamp with a hooded cobra on the shade.

She walked across to the davenport and turned and stood there, the dragons on the Chinese robe looking very life-like. She said, "Now that you're here, we might as well have a drink before you try to seduce me."

I sailed my hat to one of the chairs. I sat down on the davenport and the soft cushions came up around my thighs. I glanced up at her. She was tying the belt tightly around the middle of her robe. The action closed my view of her charms but it accentuated the fullness of her breasts and the sensual movement of her hips.

She sank down on the davenport and pulled her legs in under her on the cushions. That action opened the robe to reveal long suntanned legs. She drew the robe around her and leaned forward to the coffee table to mix a drink.

She gave it to me with a provocative grin and her eyes were lidded. She lifted her own glass and touched mine and said, "Here's to crime."

"I took a long pull from my glass and put it on the coffee table. I said, "Baby, you've got a good job at Peerless but you don't make the kind of money to pay the freight for this. Who's the sucker?"

She wasn't angry. She took a sip of her drink. A little of the liquor

trickled out of the corner of her mouth. "I can do other things besides take dictation."

I said, "Why put all this money into a North Clark Street fire trap? This could fit on North Shore Drive or out in Wilmette. Not on North Clark."

"Light me a cigarette."

I leaned forward and got two from the cigarette box. I stuck them in my mouth and lighted them and then gave one to her. As my hand touched hers, emotion seemed to flood her body. She closed her eyes in ecstasy and stretched like a kitten. The robe fell apart and she opened her eyes and then her hand closed the gap.

Her words came out slightly fuzzy. "This apartment was a kind of goal for me to work for. I was born in this building. I was the youngest of seven kids. I was the only girl. My father died when I was twelve. My mother worked as a scrubwoman at night to try to keep us from starving to death." She smiled. "Two of my brothers and I slept in the same bed until I was fifteen."

She took a sip of her drink. "Mother had to put a stop to that. One of my brothers sold his place one night for fifty cents. That was my first lesson about the birds and bees."

She laughed. "But I was smart for my age. I got fifty cents for myself. I learned I had something men were willing to pay for. For a long time it was strictly chicken feed. I had North Clark Street stamped all over me. I wore cheap clothes, I used cheap perfume and all the guys I got were cheap. So I went to business college and took typing and shorthand."

She puffed on her cigarette and with a sensuous wriggle of her body put her glass on the coffee table. "The course didn't cost me anything." She was getting a little drunk and she giggled. "The principal was a man. He saw my—possibilities. He got me a job. It was addressing catalogs for a mail order house. I made twenty-seven dollars a week. It didn't last long. The mail order super had eyes. And an invalid wife. I became his secretary. I studied the other girls —the way they talked, the way they acted, the way they dressed. Gradually I forgot North Clark Street. And then I set my goal. I wanted to show this goddam street. I had it licked."

She laughed down deep in her throat. "My boy friend's about as virile as a wet rag. But his money let me come back to North Clark

and kick it in the teeth. Every time I come up those lousy stairs and come in that door—" she waved her hand and the robe fell open again "—I can remember when we slept three in a bed in this goddam fire trap." Her lips parted and she heaved a sigh.

I said, "Your sugar daddy might be quite a guy. But I'm not interested in him. Tell me about your real boy friend. The one that stutters." I was making a stab in the dark, and I hoped it would work.

She recoiled as if I had struck her. Her body moved away from me on the davenport in an involuntary cringe. Fear left its traces on her face. Just as suddenly she got control of herself and tried to appear unruffled. "I don't have any other boy friend."

I said, "Don't try to kid me. There's a word in the dictionary for dames like you. You'll find it under the N's. You're what they call a nymphomaniac. You need a man like a drunk needs liquor or a hop head needs dope. You're hotter than a firecracker and no wet rag can light your fuse. All he can do for you is pay the bills and play a little. Who's the guy that stutters? One half of the pair that staged the killing in front of the joint where you work? The stuttering guy who helped to murder Bill Macaulay?"

She stared at me with her eyes wide. I was impelled to believe the guilelessness in her face. All I could see there was the primal urge. She said, "Because I work at Peerless you think I had something to do with your partner's murder?" Her manner reproached me. "I'm no lily but I'm no party to murder. Believe me, I've got no other boy friend. How long would he stand for that? Do I look dumb enough to throw away this—" she waved her arm again "—to two-time him?"

I grinned. "I think you'd two-time your own brother."

She stretched her arm to the back of the davenport and I heard the click as she pressed a hidden switch on the ledge. The indirect lighting faded out. The only light remaining was the glow from the cobra lamp behind the davenport.

She smiled at me and her tongue licked her lips. She stretched again like a sensuous feline and every curve of her body was visible in the sweep of the blue silk. "Do we have to talk shop?" she whispered.

She moved suddenly and her body was in my lap. Her arms went around my neck. Her lips parted and her mouth came down over mine. The smell of alcohol mingled with the odor of her female-

ness as she strained against me. Her hands clung to me and her body trembled under my touch as emotion swept through her.

She flung herself back. She was gasping for breath. Her lips were parted. Her eyes were glittering. She reached for the cobra lamp and the click of the switch plunged the room into darkness. I heard the rustle of silk and felt the cushions sink as she shifted her supple body.

I reached out my hand in the dark. My fingers touched flesh. I moved my feet on the floor and the silk robe rustled. Her hand came over and took mine. After a moment she dropped my hand. She flung her arms around my neck again.

Her lips were demanding. I could feel the pound of her heart through my clothes. Her body was pinioned against me and every muscle was pulling me closer. She moaned softly and whispered, "You're hurting me." Her hand touched the hard metal of my holstered gun and she withdrew in shock.

I took out the gun and put it on the ledge behind the table. I took off my coat and I could hear her breathing in the velvet dark. My shoes made no noise as they fell into the broadloom.

I went back to the davenport and she uttered a low moan and reached up to me. She put her lips on mine and pulled me toward her, straining to drain every drop of ecstasy from the moment. Her body was trembling against me. Her fingers dug into my shoulders. Her teeth sank into my neck. Suddenly she relaxed and lay back, moaning softly.

Something round and cold and hard was pressed into the middle of my back. I went rigid. I cursed myself for being a damn fool. She had reached my gun on the ledge and now she had circled my body with her arm and was holding the gun against me. Now she would be laughing at me. But her voice, low in her throat, said, "What's the matter, honey?"

I didn't answer. The pressure of the gun in my back grew stronger. Suddenly the cobra lamp was switched on and light flooded our bodies. Her eyes were wide and startled under mine. I could see both her hands. Neither held a gun.

I tried to turn my head but the pressure of the gun increased. Looking down, all I could see was the tip of a tan and white shoe on the carpet. The tip had a pattern of holes in the leather. A dia-

mond pattern. And then a man's voice said, "Damn you! I told you to get his clothes, not m-m-make l-l-love to him."

I didn't hear anything else. The gun butt slammed down on my skull. Pain rocked my head and I felt my body roll off the davenport to the floor. The broadloom tickled my hide. I was conscious of confused movement in the room and the faint sound of voices before I drifted into blackness.

CHAPTER FIVE

LIEUTENANT BEN FRANKLIN'S laugh came over the telephone wire. It was the first time I'd ever heard him laugh. "Let me go over it again, Hardy. I want to be sure I got this straight. You go to this Granger's love nest and get yourself trapped on her work bench. Then her boy friend clouts you over the head while you're helpin' her do her homework. And then they beat it and take your clothes with them?"

"Every goddam stitch," I said. "I'm naked as a jay bird. They left me my gun. And that stuttering son of a bitch got away from me."

Franklin was having a hard time controlling his laughter. That only increased my anger. "So?"

"Can't you get it through your thick head? This proves The Outfit was behind Mac's murder. The gal works for the Peerless Awning Company and her boy friend stutters. The only reason they invited me here was to get my clothes and see if I had the evidence that they killed Macaulay to get. The stuttering guy said as much."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Send somebody over here with some clothes. They can buy something at a second hand joint. Suit size 42 long. Shirt 16½-33. Make it snappy."

In between laughs Franklin managed to say, "Okay."

Half an hour later a plainclothesman came into Ella Granger's apartment with a big bundle under his arm. I grabbed at it.

The guy said, holding it away from me, "First, there's the little matter of twenty-five bucks."

That made me still madder. "Well, I haven't got a dime. The bums took my clothes and my wallet was in my pants."

"But you will pay me?"

"Of course, I'll pay you."

The guy grinned again. "They dropped your clothes in the hall

just outside the door. They went through everything you wore. Cut the linings out. They were looking for something. They didn't want your money. They left your wallet. Did they think you had the evidence Macaulay was going to spill to the Crime Committee?"

He stepped outside and returned a minute later with my badly rumpled clothes.

I said, "That's the only reason the blonde witch invited me over here. I was fool enough to fall for it." I was mad clear through. "They made a sucker out of me twice. Elio held me in my apartment long enough to let a pal search the office in case Mac's evidence was hidden there. Then Ella Granger invited me over so they could get my clothes to see if I had the evidence."

I was scrambling into my pants and I was seeing red. If I'd had Clem Dorish or any one of his scummy outfit in the room then, I'd have broken his neck with my bare hands. They'd outwitted me twice and I felt like a moron. I felt more like a moron when I took twenty-five bucks out of my wallet and gave it to him. He put it in his pocket and gave me that automatic grin of his. "Think the stuttering guy is the one we want for Mac's killing?"

I felt like a fool. I was made at the world. I took it out on him. "You figure it out. You and Franklin are so damn smart!"

The next morning about ten o'clock I again walked into the Central Station on South State Street. But this time I didn't want to see Ben Franklin in Homicide. I rode the elevator up to the third floor. I went down the main hall and turned off into an east-west corridor from which doors led into many cubbyholes. One housed the *Robbery Detail*, one was *Sex Offenses*, and the other was *Narcotics*. I went into the latter. It was about six-by-nine and held only a desk, a settee and a couple chairs.

There was a gray haired Irishman at the desk. He had the map of Ireland on his face. There was a girl sitting on the settee. She was just a girl—about twenty-two, ordinary brown hair, ordinary clothes—she might have been anybody's wife or sister, maybe a stenographer or a clerk in a dime store. They'd been talking when I barged in, but they stopped and the gray-haired guy looked up at me.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

I said, "Pardon me for butting in, but I'm looking for Bob Murtaugh. I know he's in Narcotics, but I don't know where."

The gray-haired guy got up and stuck out his hand and said, "I'm Lieutenant Haley. Murtaugh's one of our best men but he's out right now. Can I help you?"

The girl was staring at me like I had just swallowed a goldfish. Haley saw the look and made a motion with his eyes. She got up and walked out of the office.

I grinned. "She looked at me like my zipper was unzipped."

Haley didn't think that was funny. He just stared at me. Then he said, "What did you want with Murtaugh? Maybe I can help?"

I said, "My name's Hardy. Jeff Hardy. Bill Macaulay was my partner. The private eye who was shot down on the street yesterday afternoon."

Haley sat down and motioned me to the settee. "Lieutenant Franklin came down to discuss the case. Macaulay is supposed to have said 'mainline speedball' before he died, I believe. Lieutenant Franklin wondered if his murder was connected with the narcotics racket."

I said, bitterly, "Wondered? The Outfit gunned him. They didn't want him to testify to the Crime Committee. And my guess is that Mac found out something that would tie The Outfit to the dope racket."

Haley made a tent of his fingers on the desk before him and gave me a sad look. "We know damn well The Outfit is up to their ears in the dope racket. It's big money—it brings them in millions of dollars a year now that they've started peddling heroin to school kids—and they won't stop at murder to protect the racket." He got up from his chair and paced the floor. He stopped in front of me and put his right hand on his left shoulder and said, "I'd cut both arms off right up to here if I could clamp them in jail for the rest of their damn lives!" He sat down again, his shoulders sagging. "All we ever get are the small fry. The addicts and the pushers. The big shots go around as free as a bird. We can't reach 'em."

"Why not?"

Haley heaved a big sigh and then reached into a drawer of his desk to take out a cardboard box. He held it out to me and I looked

in as he took off the lid. "There," he said, "you got the dope racket in a nutshell."

In the box was a hypodermic needle that was none too clean. Four or five empty gelatin capsules about half the size of a vitamin capsule. A teaspoon with the handle bent back. A penny box of matches. An eyedropper. A heavy rubber band.

Haley said, "An addict gets the habit. He goes 'on the needle'. They start in lots of ways. Maybe they puff a little marijuana. It gives them a kick. They graduate to heroin. At first it gives them a feeling of peace and elation. Then their bodies get so they demand the stuff. First they take a shot a day, then two, then five and then they're really sick. Nothing can save them. They've got to have the stuff. They turn to pimping, often for tramps who are on the stuff themselves and have turned prostitute to earn the money to get their own dope. Or they go to boosting, shoplifting; turning the stolen stuff over to fences to get the $5 to $40 a day they need to keep them going on the stuff."

I was getting a little sick at my stomach. He grimaced at me and went on. "They empty the capsule of heroin, or 'cap' in a spoon. They add water or maybe milk sugar and then they heat the bottom of the spoon until it turns into syrup. They put a rubber band around their arm to bring the veins close to the surface. Then they suck the dope up in the needle and inject it into the vein. That's what they call a 'mainline speedball'. It goes to work in seconds. But in a matter of hours, depending on how 'sick' they are, they have to do the same damn thing over again."

I said, "It seems to me the law could do something to . . ."

"Yeah," he said, "we ought to do something about it. We've been trying for years. I've been in the Bureau for fifteen years myself. We've got more addicts now than we ever had. There are two reasons for it. Fifteen years ago the entire Bureau of Narcotics consisted of two teams of five each. Now we have forty-eight men. There's a Narcotics man—or men—in every one of our thirty-nine precinct stations. With more men we naturally find more addicts—arrest more pushers—but that's not the reason why the racket's worse. The big shots decided to widen their market by selling to kids. School kids.

"Last month we found a twelve-year-old girl who was on the needle. The pushers give the kids free samples—to get them on the needle. When they get them 'hooked' the price is anything the traffic will bear but starts at a dollar and a half a 'cap'. We had a kid in here two weeks ago. He had a 'cap' but he didn't have a needle so he stuck pins in his arm till he had a vein open and then poured the junk in with an eye-dropper. He was seventeen years old and his folks didn't even know he was on the stuff."

I said, "It's a filthy, dirty racket."

"Sure, and until this year all we had to fight it with was the Harrison Act. The sale of drugs was simply a misdemeanor. All we could do with an addict was sock him two hundred bucks like a vag. This year the Legislature passed a law making it a felony to sell to minors and we can stick them for two years to life."

I said, "It seems to me you could get the pushers through the addicts. And through the pushers you could nail the big shots."

Haley grunted. "Theoretically that sounds good. But it doesn't work out that way. Their set-up is hard to crack. A big shot is head of the Chicago operations. Maybe he's got five Number One peddlers under him. These Number One peddlers got maybe ten or twenty pushers working for them. They're the guys who find the customers and peddle the stuff at retail.

"The Big Shot controls the supply. He sells to the Number One pushers or maybe pays them a regular salary. The Number One pushers move it on to the peddlers for maybe a dollar a 'cap'. They get about 488 caps out of every ounce, which means that they collect about $488 for each ounce of the stuff they move. The retail peddlers then sell it to the addicts at anywhere from a dollar-and-a-half up. This means that on every ounce the retail peddler moves he tends to take in at least seven hundred and thirty-two dollars, giving him a profit of at least two hundred forty-four dollars per ounce. But the retail peddler doesn't even play fair with the addict. The 'caps' he gets have been 'cut' with milk sugar or something else so that the peddler sometimes makes as many as eighteen hundred or nineteen hundred 'caps' out of each ounce. They can, and often do, make as much as two thousand dollars an ounce."

"The Big Shot? With profits like that for the peddlers, many of

whom are addicts themselves, what does the Big Shot himself make on the deal?"

"A kilo—that's two and two-tenths pounds—of heroin can be bought in Italy for about one thousand dollars. That would bring between seven and ten thousand in New York. Big shots cut it and turn it over to a middleman at a quick profit and the latter cuts it some more and sells it for about thirty thousand. By the time it travels from Number One pushers down to the peddlers and then to the miserable addicts that kilo of heroin is worth about two hundred thousand dollars. That profit margin is what makes it so damn rough to stop. The Big Shots won't stop at anything to protect their racket."

"Can't you get the peddlers through the addicts; the Number One pushers through the peddlers and the big shots through the Number One pushers?"

"There's a joker there. One of every five 'junkies' we bring in is a minor. We throw them in the cooler and they sweat it out without the drug until they crave it so damn bad they're willing to do anything to be 'put straight'. Our price for a shot is the name of the peddler. Nine times out of ten we get it. We put our operatives on the peddler and it's only a question of time till we get him red-handed—either trying to sell or with the stuff in his possession. There's the joker. The Number One pusher is never an addict. We can't hold back his drugs on him because he's not an addict. We can't make them talk. They'll take a rap rather than squeal on the Big Shot. So we're stymied."

I was a little bitter and a little confused. "With all these operatives working for you, you got no hint of any of the Big Shots behind this dirty racket?"

"Sure. We got hints. We got ideas. But you can't put a guy in the jug on ideas and one guy arrested too quick will undo all the work we've done."

Then he smiled for the first time. "We're getting closer. We're closing in on one guy and I think we'll get him. He lives on the South Side but he works West Madison with the 'horse'. That's junkie talk for heroin. His territory is Skid Row on West Madison."

I felt a thrill go through my body. I remembered the glitter in

Elio's piggish eyes—the roll of nickels he'd bounced off my jaw in my apartment. I grinned. "This guy would be tied up tighter than hell with Clem Dorish and The Outfit, wouldn't he?"

"No doubt about it," Haley said, "if we could just tie that Dorish up with the racket."

"His name wouldn't be Elio, would it?"

I told him of my encounter with a man who answered Elio's description and why I thought his call on me and his search of my apartment had a double purpose. Not only to see if Macaulay's evidence against The Outfit was in my apartment but also to keep me occupied for long enough to let a confederate search the office. "The more I hear," I said, "the more I'm convinced that Macaulay was going to spill his stuff to the Crime Committee and some of that stuff had to do with The Outfit's connection with the narcotics racket."

Haley said, "Anything we can do to help Homicide on this, we'll do. You can depend on that."

I thanked him and got up to go and then I remembered the astonished look on the face of Haley's previous visitor. "If it's any of my business, who was the girl? When I mentioned the name of Bob Murtaugh she looked at me like I was cursing in church."

Haley smiled briefly but there wasn't any humor in him. "That's Rosie O'Grady. Probably not her real name. She's a dope peddler. We had her in here to talk things over. She runs the cigarette stand at the De Luxe Cocktail Lounge out on West Madison. She's a peddler but we're letting her get by. She won't sell to kids or first-timers. Only to confirmed addicts. We're letting her get by because she's close to Elio. Maybe by watching her we can finally land Elio."

I had an uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. "When I asked about Murtaugh you said he was out. What did you mean by that?"

"I didn't know who you were then. You hadn't introduced yourself so I said the first thing that came into my head. The fact is, we don't know where Bob Murtaugh is. I haven't heard from him since last Saturday night. I'm afraid the Big Shots caught up with him. He was getting close to pay dirt on The Outfit. I'm afraid he's dead."

When I got to the office the telephone was ringing. I unlocked the hall door and ran through the outer office to the private one. I lifted the phone and said hello and a woman's voice said, "I've been trying to get you for hours." She sounded like she was crying.

The voice was familiar but I couldn't identify it. Then she said, "This is Betty Conroy. I met you yesterday in—Mr. Macaulay's office. I've got to see you. Quickly."

I said, "The last time I accepted an invitation from a lady I got my skull creased with a gun butt." I rubbed my hand over the back of my head and the bruise made by the stuttering man's gun butt was tender and sore to the touch. "I'll see you here. I'll wait till you come."

"I can't come down there," she said. "You'll have to come to me." She gave me an address on South Damen, just south of Madison.

I said, "No soap. My skull's not as tough as it used to be."

"I can't come there," she said, "they might be watching me."

"Who's they?"

"I can't tell you over the phone." She made a sobbing little sound in her throat. Then the phone went dead in my hands.

I put up the phone. I went over and turned on the oscillating fan on the wall and opened the windows to let a little air into the stuffy office. The breeze of the fan made *Miss July* on Mac's calendar stand away from the wall. Mac had put a paper clip on each bottom corner to fasten the months together so the breeze of the fan wouldn't blow the calendar off the wall. One of the paper clips was almost ready to fall off. I got up and fastened it tighter.

Miss July was smiling at me. I smiled back. I made the mental observation that Betty Conroy, with her clothes off, would look a lot like *Miss July*. I also began to wonder who the "they" were that were "watching" Betty Conroy.

That did it. My curiosity bump started bothering me. I looked at my watch and it was nearly noon. I didn't think I'd get slugged at high noon if I went to see Miss Betty Conroy. I also remembered

that Mac hadn't said she was Miss or Mrs. He'd just introduced her as Betty Conroy.

I decided to accept the lady's invitation.

I got held up by a raised bridge by the *Daily News* building but in twenty minutes I parked my car in front of the address she had given me on South Damen.

It was a three-story house with a cupola and a lot of fancy gingerbread around the windows and the cornices. It had once been the home of one of Chicago's pioneer meat packers but was now a rooming house, to judge by the battery of tin mail boxes fastened to the wall of the front porch.

The card on the mailbox listed her as Miss Betty Conroy and the number on the card was twenty-nine. I went in the front door and up the steps to the second floor and hunted for the door marked twenty-nine. I rapped with my knuckles and her voice said, "Who is it?"

I said, "Jeff Hardy."

There was a little pause and then the door opened. I wasn't prepared for what I saw.

She didn't have much on; maybe panties and a bra under a silk robe that clung to her body like paper on the wall. And what a body! But I didn't give her charms a second glance, much as I would have enjoyed it.

My eyes were glued on her face. She looked like she had been crying for twenty years. Her eyes were sunk deep in their sockets and the flesh underneath was the color of putty. Her lips were trembling and her hands worried a damp handkerchief clutched in one hand. She tossed her head and the golden-brown hair tumbled on her shoulders. She put her hand out to me and said, "Thank you for coming." Sobs came out between her clenched teeth. "I just don't know what to do."

Without quite knowing what I was doing I moved closer to her and put out my arms. She moved into them like a child moving into the embrace of her father. Her head went down on the lapel of my coat and her body shook uncontrollably in my arms. I said, "Tell me what's wrong."

She said, her swimming eyes raised to mine, "I didn't know it until this morning when I got up. I saw the morning paper. I saw that he'd been—murdered." She sobbed out the last word.

I patted her shoulders. "I know how you feel. Mac was a right guy. He was my partner."

She said, "You *don't* know how I feel. He was my *father*."

I stood there with my mouth hanging open.

"Betty Conroy is my stage name," she said, "my real name is Bertha Macaulay!"

CHAPTER SIX

I SAID, "HOLY COW!"

I couldn't quite believe it. "Mac never said a word to me. Why didn't he tell me you were his daughter? Why did he introduce you as Betty Conroy yesterday afternoon?"

"I've been here in Chicago ever since school let out down in Texas. I let the school board think I was going to spend my vacation with friends on the West Coast. Then I came to Chicago as Betty Conroy and got a job as a singer at the DeLuxe Cocktail Lounge."

"That's out on Skid Row," I said. "Why on earth does a girl like you want to sing in a joint like that?"

She realized she was practically standing in the embrace of a man she had met but once, and stepped away, her face flushed with embarrassment. "I did it to help Dad."

"How?"

Her words were dynamite. "The DeLuxe Cocktail Lounge is owned by The Outfit. Clem Dorish has his office on the second floor of the building."

"Holy Cow! You have been spying on The Outfit? Your life wouldn't be worth a nickel if they ever found it out."

She stared at me. There wasn't any fright in her—only a stern determination to even the score with the men she knew were responsible for her father's death. "They didn't suspect anything. They still don't. They still think I'm Betty Conroy, a singer, nothing else."

"Mac must have been out of his head, exposing you to the danger of being caught by those rats. What did you do? What could you do to help Mac?"

Her voice had lost some of its friendliness. "I learned the names of men high in city and state politics who came to see Clem Dorish in his offices over the DeLuxe. Men who had no business seeing Dorish at any time, unless it was to collect their cut of Outfit profits. I got Dorish's unlisted telephone number and Bob Murtaugh tapped the telephones of some big shots making calls to him and he and dad

got enough evidence to put half a dozen big shots behind the bars for the rest of their lives."

"Bob Murtaugh? The guy that worked for the Narcotics Bureau?"

"Yes."

Little prickles of fear ran up my spine. "Where is Bob? When was the last time you saw him?"

"Last week. He and Dad had a meeting at the apartment here and they recapped a lot of evidence they had to tie up The Outfit with city and other police officials. It was the evidence Dad was going to present to the Crime Committee."

I said, "Do you remember any of the names, any of the details?"

She remembered plenty. She gave me the name of a state representative involved in the cashing of dozens of state payroll checks made out to non-existent individuals and cashed by members of The Outfit; the loot being divided between the state official who had accepted commissions for the sale of millions of envelopes to state bureaus—a practice expressly forbidden in the statutes. She gave me the names of police officials who didn't trust savings or checking accounts in Chicago banks but had a queer affinity for keeping all their cash and bonds in safety deposit vaults. She gave me the name of one police official who had three hundred thousands dollars in cash and bonds in a safe deposit box; which he claimed to have saved over a period of twelve years from a salary of six thousand dollars a year.

"That's wonderful," I said, "if we've just got the details to go along with it."

"Dad put it all down in black and white in his own handwriting. Names, dates, times. They were all cut and dried cases he could prove."

"Where's this record Mac made in his own handwriting?" I wanted to know that. That's why Elio had slugged me to allow a pal to search the office. Elio's pal hadn't found it in the office and neither Ben Franklin nor I could find it.

"I don't know," she said. "But I heard Dad tell Murtaugh he'd put it in a safe place where it would be easily found if anything happened to them." She gave me a sad smile and her hands crumpled the handkerchief some more. "I had a carbon copy."

"You had a carbon copy? What happened to it?"

"It was stolen," she said. "Last night while I was at work. I didn't discover it until this morning. I slept late and then I saw the morn-

ing paper and I knew Dad had been... I went to where I had hidden the carbon copy and it was gone."

"Where had you hidden it?"

"In the bottom of my vanity dresser. Under some clothes."

"What did it look like, this carbon copy?"

"There were six sheets of legal size paper."

I had been thinking about that bowling ball again. But I knew that it was impossible to hide six sheets of paper, no matter how thin, in the fingers of a bowling ball. A lot of things began to add up. Elio had stalled me in my apartment long enough to let somebody search the office. Ella Granger had lured me to her apartment as a ruse to see if I had Macaulay's evidence hidden in my clothes. After failing in both attempts to find it on me or in the office, they had evidently transferred their attention from Mac's partner to his daughter. I shivered a little at that thought. If they were the ones who had stolen the carbon copy from her apartment, then it proved that they knew she wasn't a singer named Betty Conroy but Bill Macaulay's daughter.

I said, "Did anybody besides you and Mac know that you had that carbon copy? Murtaugh?"

"I don't think so."

"In any of the evidence you saw on the carbon copy, did you see anything about the narcotics racket? There must have been some tie-up between The Outfit and the dope racket or Bob Murtaugh wouldn't have been working with Mac on it. Remember anything?"

She sat down on the edge of a chair and gave me a helpless, bewildered look "I don't think there was anything about narcotics." Suddenly she started sobbing. She put her handkerchief to her eyes but she couldn't stem the flood of tears. Her shoulders shook with the agony, and pity for her sorrow made me feel a raw anger against the rats who had caused it. I went to her and put my hands on her shoulder. She looked at me with no apology for her tears and no concern over the ravages her sobs were wreaking with her face. She took my hand and gave it a friendly squeeze. She got up and braced her shoulders and gave me a brave smile. "I'll be all right now. I was just overwhelmed."

I tried to be reassuring but I couldn't put my heart in it. Every attempt I had made to get background for charges against The Outfit had backfired. Elio had made a sap of me; Ella Granger had certainly made me look a little less than brilliant. I had been unsuc-

cessful in finding written evidence which I knew Macaulay had left behind him, and now the carbon copy of that evidence was probably in the hands of The Outfit.

I said, "I think we should tell Lieutenant Franklin that you are Macaulay's daughter, but I don't think we should let anybody else know. I'll make whatever funeral arrangements you want for Mac. And the smartest thing in the world for you to do from here on is to stick right here in your apartment. Stay away from the DeLuxe Cocktail Lounge. There's not a thing you can do there now, and I don't want you to take a chance with any of Dorish's goons."

She came over to me and put her arms out and gave me a sisterly peck on the cheek. I took her in my arms and put my kiss on her lips. Unexpected warmth was in her response. Her lips squirmed under mine and her arms pulled me close against her. A current of electricity ran up the back of my legs and I felt light-headed with pleasure. This woman had produced a feeling in me I had never experienced before. I felt physical desire, but something more. The protective instincts of the male for his mate were in me, too.

I held her away but she made no move to disengage her arms. I said, "You don't have to put the pressure on me to make me stand by your side and find the rats that killed Mac. He was your father, but he was my partner. A better guy never lived."

I didn't know whether she'd slap my face in anger over my implication she was using her sex to get me to buck The Outfit but I had to say it. Her reaction was very pleasant. She kissed me again and clung to me. "I didn't know what to do. That's why I called you. Now I've got a friend. Cops don't do much good."

I said, "You're sour, baby, because your father got a raw deal. All cops aren't wrong guys. The majority are just like you and I. They want to see Dorish and his kind in the hot seat or in jail for the rest of their lives." I held her away and looked deep into those pretty, trusting eyes and realized that I was falling as I had never fallen before. This woman was mine. I had to bring her Dorish's head on a platter. I gave her chin a little punch with my knuckles and said, "Keep your chin up and keep away from the DeLuxe. Let papa handle it."

She gave me a smile when I went out the door.

I went back to the office and called Ben Franklin. He almost dropped the phone when he learned that Betty Conroy was Bertha Macaulay, and he almost fainted when I told him she had had a

carbon copy of her father's testimony for the Crime Committee, and he almost died when he learned that the carbon copy had been stolen. He agreed with me that we should keep her identity out of th papers, although we also agreed that The Outfit was already aware that they had had a spy in their midst.

Franklin was surprised to learn that Bob Murtaugh had been working with Macaulay. He ventured the opinion that the news confirmed the possibility that some of Macaulay's evidence concerned the dope traffic. "The fact that Macaulay is dead and Murtaugh has disappeared makes it look like they were on the trail of something hot in heroin."

I said, "Got any leads on Macaulay's killers?"

"Only what we got from stoolies. Dorish and The Outfit got a couple of hoods that answer the description you gave of the gunmen. One of them is a baby-faced guy that used to be known as the 'baby bandit'. When he was still in his teens he made a specialty of sticking up service stations. They cooled him off in Pontiac and when he got out Dorish took him under his wing. His name's Dale Mester. The other guy—the stuttering goon—is an old pro. He's served two terms in stir. He's forty-two. Name is Lou Bergen. We got the pick-up news out but they've evidently gone into hiding. If we grab 'em I'll let you know. Keep in touch." Franklin hung up.

The office was muggy and stuffy. I got up and switched on the oscillating fan near the door and the air stirred up the atmosphere. It was windy but it wasn't cool. *Miss July* on the calendar was standing out from the wall in the breeze from the fan. I noticed one of the paper clips with which Mac had fastened the sheets together had again dropped off and the breeze was threatening to tear the calendar off the wall. I got up and put the paper clip back on. Then the telephone rang. When I said "Hello" I was guessing whether it would be Ben Franklin or Bertha Macaulay. I was hoping it would be the latter.

It was neither. It was Jerry Warsaw and his voice was trembling as if he had just been sentenced to be shot at sunrise. His voice was low and hurried and I could feel the undercurrent of fear in it. I didn't know the printing executive too well but I was surprised at the tremble in the man's voice as he said, "Hardy, I'm scared stiff. I don't want to get mixed up in a murder case. I'm clear up to my neck now. I don't like it."

"You? Murder? What are you talking about?"

"The Macaulay case. That's why I called you. I thought you'd be able to tell me what to do."

"Spill it." I could feel the short hair at the back of my neck prickle with apprehension.

Warsaw said, "A man telephoned me here at my office. He must have called from a pay phone somewhere in the suburbs because I heard the operator tell him to drop coins in. I don't know who he was. I never heard his voice before in my life." Warsaw was really jittery. "He sounded like a villain in the movies. Everything he said sounded like a hiss."

"What did he want? Get down to bed rock."

"He says he knows who killed Macaulay. He wants to sell me the proof."

I knew there was something off color here. It just didn't add up. "Why should anybody try to sell such information to you?"

Warsaw gave a little laugh but there wasn't any humor behind it. "I run a printing plant. I run off all the comics for Hal Benton—and I also print the *Madison Booster*. That's a weekly circulated in the West Madison neighborhood. I don't edit the thing; I only print it. But I guess this guy made the same mistake others have made; he thought I was the editor and would be interested in a scoop on the Macaulay case. You know Macaulay was on duty in this area when he was still on the force."

"It still doesn't add up. If this guy knows who killed Macaulay he could get more dough from the *Trib* or the *Times* than he could from a weekly like the *Booster*."

"I thought of that, too. All I'm telling you is what he told me." He seemed a little nettled with me.

I said, "What did he want to sell?"

"He said he's got the written evidence that Macaulay was going to present to the Crime Committee. He didn't say where he got it or what it was. I said I didn't edit the *Booster* so I wouldn't have any use for the information. To get rid of him I suggested that he take it to the police. Or to you. I told him you were Macaulay's partner."

"You did right. If he can give me proof who killed Mac, he can have every dime I've got. How much does he want?"

"I don't know. He said to find out if you were interested, and he'd call me back later." Warsaw paused and then he said, "I don't think I want to mess around with this, Hardy. I think I'd better call the cops."

"Don't do that. When this guy calls back, tell him he's made a sale. Find out when and where we can make the deal."

There was a long pause. Then Warsaw said, "Okay, Hardy. But I'm scared of the whole thing. I don't want to get mixed up in murder. First it was Hal Benton, and then Macaulay. I'm scared."

"You got nothing to worry about. I'll handle it. When the guy calls back, tell him what I said. I'll give you a ring or else drop by and see you late this afternoon."

"All right. But I still think I ought to call the cops."

"Don't do that," I urged him. "I want to get my hands on Mac's killer before the cops catch up with him." I hung up before Warsaw could get cold feet and change his mind.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT WAS NEARLY FIVE that afternoon before I drove my car west on Madison. The Warsaw Printing Company was in a two-story building that had once been an example of modern architecture until the days when West Madison turned into Skid Row. The Row was a place where nobody but a cop would give a second glance to a man lying in the gutter, to find out whether he was a derelict drunk or whether he had his throat cut or a knife in his belly; the Row where they sniffed heroin in dirty hallways, smoked marijuana openly on the streets and where men had been murdered for fifty cents so the killer could get on a jag on "canned heat". All of this in the night hours. In the daytime Skid Row was just a garish, noisy, littered hangout for the bums of a continent. All in all, it was one hell of a place.

The Warsaw Printing Company was far enough west to be on the fringe of the neon-lighted honkey-tonks that line the street not far from where Ogden Avenue cuts across.

I couldn't find a parking place so I drove over to Adams and told a service station attendant to fill the tank and check the oil and rubber. I walked back to Madison and started up the south side of the street.

The DeLuxe Cocktail Lounge, its neon lights dead at this early hour—just a couple minutes before five—was next door to the Warsaw Printing Company. The lobby was bedecked with posters of near-naked entertainers. The posters stressed music and song but I noticed that the printed claims were accompanied with unrestricted views of female flesh.

Then my eyes bugged out. Staring back at me, a provocative smile on her beautiful features, was Betty Conroy. Bertha Macaulay. The poster was done in garish colors but it couldn't hide the beauty of the golden-brown hair that tumbled down over her bare shoulders. Her body was sheathed in a form-fitting gown that accentuated every luscious curve. The V of the neckline dove almost to her waist. The poster said: *Listen to the Torchant Tunes of Betty Conroy.* I

wondered what a torchant tune was. And a sudden desire to see Bertha Macaulay again rushed into my brain.

A wavering voice said, "Help me," and I whirled around.

Standing in the recessed doorway of the DeLuxe was a tattered old man who carried a white cane and a tin cup. He had on glasses so dark no one could tell whether he was blind or not. I happened to know he wasn't. I had used "Blind Joe" many times as a source of information.

I walked over to Blind Joe and dropped a half dollar in the tin cup. Blind Joe said, "God bless you," in his wavering voice.

I said, "Joe, who's spending more money than usual around here?"

Joe whined and turned his dark glasses on me. "I ain't no stoolie."

I said, "You're a goddam fake!" Then I grinned and rubbed my knuckles over the stubble of his chin playfully. I lowered my voice. "Who's spending money all of a sudden around here? More than usual?"

Joe repeated his punch line. "I ain't no stoolie." Then his cracked lips parted in an evil grin that showed snags of teeth. "One bastard I don't like. All of a sudden he rides ever' place in taxis and I think he's playin' around with a dish that never used to see him for dust." He dug in his pocket in indignation and displayed a metal disk with a hole in it. "The stuttering bum gave me a washer. Thought he was being cute."

"What's his name, Joe?" I was tingling with anticipation. Maybe I was on the verge of tying up some loose ends. Maybe I was going to beat the cops at their own game.

Blind Joe said, "Lou Bergen."

"Where does Bergen hang out, Joe?"

"Around the DeLuxe, mostly. He's one of Clem's muscle boys." He added hastily, as if he knew he was talking too much. "But I ain't seen him today. I don't know where he lives."

"Who's the dame he's playin' around with?"

"I don't know." His lips came apart and he licked them with his tongue. "Seems to me he called her Stella or something like that."

"Ella? Ella Granger?"

"Yeah."

"What does the gal look like?"

Blind Joe turned his dark glasses squarely on me. "You tryin' to prove that I ain't blind, kid?"

I grinned at him. "I know you can see as well as I can, Joe. You

got a little racket. You can play hell out of it as far as I'm concerned. I'm no cop. What did the dame look like?"

"Blonde. Bushel basket full of hair on her head. Rigged out like a Christmas tree."

I took out my billfold this time and dropped a five in the tin cup. "Thanks, Joe."

Joe said, "You shouldn't have done that, kid. Anybody seen that would tell Clem Dorish I was stoolin' for the cops."

"I'm not a cop, Joe. You know that."

I left Blind Joe and moved down the sidewalk toward the Warsaw Printing Company. I had picked up several items of information that might come in handy later. I was fairly certain now that the man who stuttered and whose tan shoes had a diamond pattern on the tip who had slugged me in Ella Granger's apartment *was* Lou Bergen. The fact that he was spending lavishly also pointed to the fact that he had been paid recently for a job—the gunning of Bill Macaulay. The fact that he hung around the DeLuxe also tied him up directly with The Outfit and Clem Dorish. And it wasn't too difficult to figure out that Lou Bergen was partaking of Ella Granger's charms—that Clem Dorish was underwriting. That bit of information might come in handy later, too. Dorish wouldn't like it if he found out that one of his goons was sharing his babe.

The Warsaw Printing Company building was about forty feet wide. It was a long building but a beaverboard partition about twenty feet from the front separated the office from the plant. I could hear machinery running and figured the linotypes and presses were behind the partition, although the sound didn't seem to be noisy enough for a plant that turned out a million comic books a month.

In the bare office there was a wooden railing with several desks behind it. Warsaw evidently didn't go much for pulchritude. There was a bony-faced woman with stringy hair and a pair of dark-rimmed glasses at one of the desks.

When I asked for Warsaw she made a fluttering motion with one hand and a sandpaper voice said, "You can go right ahead." She gave me a reluctant smile when she realized I had never been there before. "Mr. Warsaw's office is upstairs." She made a thrifty motion toward a door in the side wall.

I went to the door and opened it. A stairway padded with gray broadloom led upward toward the glow of a fancy lamp on a table

at the head of the stairs. When I reached the head of the stairs I gave a soft whistle.

Warsaw's office was the full width of the building and about twenty feet deep. The walls were of knotty pine, the floor was gray broadloom, the furniture was chromium and red leather and Jerry Warsaw sat behind a desk as big as a pool table. The ceiling was light gray with hidden lights around the moldings and there was a fireplace of field stone. There were a few pictures on the walls and a gray metal cabinet hid an air-conditioning unit.

I gave him a lopsided grin and said, "Pretty snazzy."

Warsaw got up from his chair and came around the desk with his hand out to shake mine. He had on gray slacks, a tweed jacket over a soft yellow shirt. His hand-painted tie had a Windsor knot in it as big as a man's fist.

His hair was the color of straw and a lock of it had a way of flopping down over one side of his forehead to make him look more like a college boy than a successful business man.

I said, "I think I'll give up my racket and go into yours. I'll buy some second-hand type and go into the printing business, if this shows the fruits of your labor."

He smiled. "When I leased the building I got both floors. The second floor wouldn't stand the weight of presses so I fixed it up for myself. Behind the office I have an apartment. I wasn't trying to put on the dog. I fixed this place up cheaper than I could rent an apartment and no landlord can up the rent on me. I was only trying to save money, not wave it around."

He went back to his desk, lit a cigarette and offered one to me. When he offered his lighter, I noticed his fingers were shaking. "What's the matter with you? You're as jittery as a cat on a tin roof."

He stared at me and his face had a sickly cast to it and his smoky eyes wavered under mine. "Frankly, Hardy, I'm scared spitless. Somehow the thought of a bullet in the back or a knife in the belly leaves me with no more backbone than an old maid."

I said, "Take it easy. Whatever the guy said on the phone it can't be that bad."

Warsaw blew smoke. His nostrils flared. "The man called me again. He made a date for tonight."

"Okay. What's he got that he thinks I'd be willing to pay for?"

He looked at me as if he didn't expect me to believe him. "He

says he's got the written evidence Macaulay was going to submit to the Crime Committee. In Macaulay's handwriting."

I didn't say anything. Warsaw went on, "The man says the papers will prove who killed Macaulay and will put the finger on the top man of The Outfit. He said Macaulay had been working quietly ever since he was kicked off the police force to get even with Dorish and the men he held responsible for it. He said Macaulay'd been tapping telephones and got a lot of information about some cops and the tie-up with The Outfit. It's all down in black and white and Macaulay had it all ready to show to the Crime Committee. That's why Macaulay was killed. To keep his mouth shut."

The room was air-conditioned but his hands were trembling again and there was perspiration on his forehead.

I asked, "How come I couldn't find this evidence? How come the cops couldn't find it? How come this guy got it? Evidence like that isn't something Macaulay would let lay around loose. Who is this guy, anyway?"

Warsaw shook his head in misery. "I don't know. He's just a voice on the telephone. Like I told you, he called me first because he thought I'd be willing to pay for the material to get a scoop for the *Booster*. When I tried to talk myself loose and suggested you, he went for that." His smoky eyes showed his fear. "Me and my big mouth. I wish I could wash my hands of the whole thing. I never asked for this."

I considered his information for a long moment. Then I said, "How's the guy going to deliver? How can we tell if he's got anything I'll want to pay for?"

Warsaw took a long time to answer that one. And when he did speak, his voice was so low I could scarcely catch his words. "That's where I come in. I'm supposed to arrange a meeting between the two of you. Tonight at nine-thirty."

"How can you arrange a meeting between us when you don't even know the guy?"

"He will meet me first and identify himself. He says he's afraid of the cops. Then he'll fix it to meet you, when he's convinced the cops haven't been let in on the deal."

"How?"

"He'll pick me up. I can't tell you where. He named half a dozen places for me to be at certain times. He'll identify himself and pick me up at one of those places. At nine-thirty he'll bring me to meet

you at Union Station. At the newsstand at the bottom of the Adams Street ramp. Then I'm to take you to him."

"It sounds corny as hell. Cloak-and-dagger stuff. The whole thing doesn't make sense."

"Why not?" Warsaw's eyes were troubled. He was still scared and he wasn't afraid to show it.

I said, "A guy that thinks he's got something valuable to peddle hasn't even named a price. That doesn't sound right. We don't know whether he wants five hundred dollars or five thousand. It's a cinch he won't turn over Mac's evidence without cash on the barrel head."

Warsaw said, "I'm afraid of the whole deal." He lit another cigarette off the butt of the first one. "I've been like this ever since Hal Benton was killed. I'm a printer. This murder stuff makes me nervous."

I got up and gave him a grin along with my hand. "I'll see you in Union Station at nine-thirty tonight. This unkown guy might have just what we're looking for."

Warsaw blinked his smoky eyes and gulped as if he were trying to swallow his fear.

I left Warsaw then and went to get my car from the service station on Adams. I drove back to my own apartment and parked the car in the parking area behind the building. I went up and used my phone to call the undertaker I had phoned previously. He had what I thought was good news. If I wanted to bring Miss Macaulay out to his parlors privately she could see her father for the last time.

Then I phoned Bertha Macaulay. She answered before the bell stopped ringing. I told her what I had done and she said, "Mr. Hardy, that was thoughtful of you. I would like to go see Dad."

"Forget the mister stuff," I said, "the name is Jeff. The undertaker's place is on the near North Side. I'll pick you up—we can have dinner some place—and then I'll take you to the undertaker's."

"Do you think it's wise? On account of The Outfit, I mean? Won't they wonder why one of Clem Dorish's singers goes to see the man they murdered?"

"I made arrangements with the undertaker. They're private. Only you and I will be there."

She said, "I don't think you should pick me up here. They may be watching me."

I said, "Do you know where *Barney's* is?"

"Yes. I've eaten there many times."

"I'll meet you there. At eight o'clock." That would give us time to eat, go to see Mac and still give me time to take her home and meet Jerry Warsaw at Union Station at nine-thirty.

She said, "All right. And thank you very much for making the ... arrangements about Dad." Then she hung up.

I showered, shaved and dressed. Then I went down and got in the car and drove over to Dearborn and parked the car in back of the office and walked through the back door into Barney's. It was only five minutes of eight by my watch but Bertha Macaulay was already there. She was seated alone at a table with her back to the wall.

I moved up the aisle with a grin on my face but she didn't see me. She was watching a tall, slender guy who had come in the front door and made a beeline for her table. As I watched, he leaned across the table and said something to her. She shook her head. He went around the table and grabbed her arm and forced her to her feet.

By that time I was close to them. I could hear his harsh, clipped words and see his white, pasty face. "Come on, baby, the Big Boy wants to have words with you."

She said, "Let go of me."

His answer was to slap her across the face. "Come on."

I went forward. I grabbed his arm and whirled him around. He had a surprised look on his smooth face but his eyes were like gimlets. The surprised look didn't last very long. I smashed my fist into his mouth. He staggered back against the table. Blood trickled out of one corner of his lips. His right hand reached for his armpit. I sprang forward. I rammed my knee into his belly. When he doubled over with the pain, I hit him on the back of the neck with the side of my hand.

I didn't hit where I wanted to. The blow only dazed him. He wobbled to his feet and staggered around like a drunken man. People were screaming. A cop ran in the front door. He fell over a chair and sprawled on the floor.

That gave the goon the time he needed. He saw the cop and he made a dive through the tables and went out the back door like he was headed for the county line. I let him go.

The cop came up, puffing for breath. "What the hell goes on?"

I said, "He was bothering the lady. I un-bothered him." I turned to her. "What did he want? Who is he?"

"He's been watching the house all day. He hangs around the

DeLuxe. He's one of Clem Dorish's boys. When I took a cab to come down here I think he followed me. He said the 'Big Boy' wanted to see me. He didn't say Dorish wanted to see me. Just the 'Big Boy'."

"Who was the goon?" I asked.

She said, "His name is Dale Mester."

"Holy Cow!" I said. "He's the 'baby bandit'. He's one of the guys that killed your father. Franklin's been looking for him. Him and Lou Bergen!"

I told the cop, "Call Ben Franklin at Homicide. Tell him Dale Mester's on the loose. He's wanted for the murder of Bill Macaulay."

The cop went out the back door, dragging at his gun. I knew that cop would never catch up with him. I knew I didn't have a chance. Dale Mester was running to the protecting wing of the "Big Boy".

CHAPTER EIGHT

WE ATE our meal without much talk. When I had finished I carried the checks up to the cashier's cage. As I picked up my change she was standing beside me, like she'd been there all her life. She tucked her hand inside my left elbow and gave me a smile—the trusting smile a little child gives her big, protective daddy. She wasn't a child; she was a mature and beautiful woman. And I wasn't her daddy. I was a common, ordinary private eye who was as proud as hell to have her hanging on my arm as if she owned me. As we went out of *Barney's* I might as well have had a sign on my back for all the patrons to read. She's mine. I'm afraid I strutted a little.

I took her to the undertaker's place on the near North Side. Mac looked as natural as if he were sleeping in the gray casket. Seeing him like that made me suck in my breath. I felt moisture gathering in my eyes but I fought the tears back.

She flung herself at Mac and kissed his cold lips. The dead feel made her recoil. She turned to me. Her eyes were big and round as she stared at me. Then the tears came. She walked into my arms and buried her head on my chest. I patted her shoulders and tried to comfort her. Her body was shaking with her sobs.

She finally stopped. She looked at me with her shining eyes. I took out my handkerchief and dabbed at them. She gave me a smile. Then she squeezed my hand and said, "I'm all right now. Shall we go?"

I looked at my watch. It was twenty after nine. My date with Jerry Warsaw at Union Station was at nine-thirty. We went out and got in my car. I went south on Dearborn to Jackson Boulevard and then turned west to Canal Street. I turned north on Canal and parked the car in a parking space near the corner of Canal and Adams, facing north.

The weather had cooled so I rolled up both windows and pushed the buttons down. Before I got out I told her, "Keep the doors

locked. I'll be back as soon as I can. Then I'll take you home, baby."

I walked down Canal, past the garbage container with the sign, Help Keep Our City Clean. I went in and opened the door and went down the iron steps to the concourse. I cut past the Western Union booth and down the west side to the newsstand at the bottom of the Adams Street ramp. Warsaw wasn't anywhere in sight. I looked at my watch. It was exactly nine-thirty.

I looked all around the milling crowd. I went in the drugstore, the coffee shop, and walked through the crowd around the newsstand. Then I walked over and stood in the doorway of the drugstore, watching a bored salesgirl trying to sell a serviceman a gyroscopic top for two bucks and a half. He watched her demonstration like a fascinated kid but he didn't buy.

It was then I saw Jerry Warsaw. I had expected him to come down the ramp from Adams Street, but I saw him coming down the iron steps from Canal Street, the same route I had taken.

He was walking down the concourse, bareheaded, slapping a rolled-up newspaper against his leg. Again I thought he looked more like a college sophomore than a successful printing executive. He looked as scared as a college basketball player one minute before the big game starts.

I took the newspaper out of his hand and glanced at the headline. It was a faded copy of the *Madison Booster*. It had only eight pages and the front page said: A&P To Build New Supermart. Exciting stuff.

I said, "Is this the kind of paper you print in that joint of yours?" I was trying to get him settled down. "The print's so damned faded you can't even read it. You must be using second-hand type."

He said, "That's the first run on tomorrow's issue. They always come off the press like that. The first hundred or so till we get a good ink distribution."

I gave him back the paper. "Where's the mysterious guy with all the evidence?"

The fright was back in his eyes. "He's parked upstairs. He didn't pick me up till a few minutes ago."

"Has he got the stuff?"

He seemed to have trouble getting the words out. "Yes, he has."

"Who is he?"

He shook his head miserably. "I don't know. I've got a feeling I've seen him some place. Or seen his picture. He seems familiar." He shivered. "I'm afraid of him."

I started for the ramp that led upward to Adams Street. Warsaw stopped me and said, "Let's go this way," and led me back the way he had come.

We climbed the iron steps to the street level and went out on Canal. We went up the sidewalk. When we reached the garbage can by the first electrolier, Warsaw lifted the lid and tossed the faded copy of the *Madison Booster* into it. We went past my car and I gave a sideward glance toward Bertha Macaulay sitting in the front seat. She had a frightened look on her face and acted like she wanted me to stop. I gave her a reassuring glance and kept pace with Warsaw.

We reached the corner and Warsaw turned east on Adams. There were half a dozen cars parked along the curb. A black Chevvy was parked about fifty feet from the entrance that led to the Adams Street ramp. I could see a little curl of exhaust from the tail pipe. I thought it odd that a driver would sit in a parked car with the engine running on a summer night. Then I remembered that the driver had information that was secret and valuable to him and he was afraid of the cops. That explained his being ready to get away from there, but fast.

As we approached I could see the silhouette of a man's head through the rear window of the coupe. As we came up to the coupe from the rear I could see that both windows were rolled all the way up.

Warsaw said, his voice wobbly. "He's still here."

I said, "I can see that."

Warsaw hesitated. Then he walked up to the door of the coupe and pulled it open. I heard him say some words but a passing car drowned them out. It didn't drown the scream that came out of him. He backed away from the coupe, clawing at his mouth with clutching fingers. He turned around to face me. His features were chalk-white and his smoky eyes were popping out of his head. He couldn't talk. "He's—he's—he's..."

I leaped for the car door. "He's what?"

"He shot himself."

I took a look for myself. I slid in on the seat and gave the guy the once-over. He was a little guy. His gray hat was pulled down over his forehead and his head rested against the back of the seat. It was a pose a man might take while sitting in his car listening to the radio. The car radio was going. Some thrush was singing about moon and June. But the little guy wasn't listening. He was dead.

His gabardine windbreaker was open and two red spots were blooming on his white shirt front. About the middle of the left side. I touched his cheek and his head fell sideways toward me. His hat fell off and I saw the long black sideburns that reached halfway down toward the point of his weasel chin.

I looked all around the inside of the car, but I didn't find what I was looking for. I got out. "This guy didn't shoot himself," I said. "He was murdered."

At that word I thought Warsaw was going to pass out on the sidewalk. "I should never have had anything to do with this. I knew it was wrong." His chin was wavering as he talked. "The police will think I killed him. I was the last one to see him alive."

I said, "Hell, you got nothing to worry about. You didn't have any reason to bump him off."

He bucked up a little at that. "I couldn't. I haven't got a gun." He started turning all his pockets inside out.

I had to laugh at him, he was so damned scared. I said, "Anybody could have come along and got in with the little guy. The windows were rolled up, the radio was blaring, and there's the traffic noises. A couple of shots would sound like backfires. Nobody would pay any attention."

Warsaw was still green around the gills. "Shut the radio off. It's driving me insane." A whiskey baritone was singing "Birmingham Jail."

I said, "I'm not shutting it off. The cops might find some fingerprints on it that don't belong to Mr. Sideburns." I grinned at him. "I'll give you something to do. Find a cop or else call the cops. You might as well ask for Lieutenant Ben Franklin of Homicide."

He went away fast, glad to escape from the knowledge that a man's life had been snuffed out with two bits of lead in the short time that he had left him in the coupe and brought me back.

But there was a pucker between my eyes as I tried to figure out

who else knew that the little guy with the sideburns had Bill Macaulay's evidence to peddle. I quit thinking when I always got the same answer. Me, Jerry Warsaw, and Bertha Macaulay, who had been parked just around the corner from the murder. Parked around the corner from the little guy who had stolen her father's evidence. I wondered if she had a gun in that innocent little handbag she carried.

The cops came up Adams with the siren echoing like a banshee. Lieutenant Ben Franklin and a pair of aides got out and came across the sidewalk to us, standing beside the death car. I introduced him to Warsaw and gave him a brief recap on the happenings of the day and night. He gave me a look out of those gray eyes. "This is sort of getting to be a habit. First Hal Benton. Then your partner. Now this guy. Any tie-up between this guy and the other two stiffs?"

I didn't like his referring to Mac as a stiff but I held my temper in check. "I don't even know this guy."

Franklin gave his gray stare to Warsaw. "You?"

Warsaw started trembling again. "I never saw him before in my life."

Franklin said, "What the hell you shivering about? You're a grown man." He grinned wryly, "You act like you might have pumped them bullets in his belly yourself."

I caught Warsaw as he staggered. I said, "Hell, Franklin, the guy damn near fainted on me before. He's scared spitless. He's never been this close to a croppie before."

Franklin said, "He wouldn't be if you hadn't been so damn smart to try to beat the cops. If you'd let him call us we could've had plants all around the block."

"And the guy would still have got shot."

Franklin spat on the sidewalk and walked over to the coupe. He got in and sat on the seat beside the dead man. He didn't touch anything. He just sat there, looking around the interior of the little car. He didn't touch the radio knob, either.

Presently he got out of the car and came over to us. "The latest corpse," he said, bitterly, "is none other than another of the prize witnesses for the Crime Committee. The same as your partner."

I said, "Mel Brennan?"

"I thought you didn't know him?"

"I didn't. I read the papers. He and Mac were going to testify before the Crime Committee at the same time."

Warsaw looked like he was going to throw up. "I thought he looked familiar. I must have seen his picture some time." He looked at Franklin with his smoky eyes. "He was a lawyer, wasn't he?"

"He was a pretty good one. On the criminal side. Fact is, back in the good old days Brennan sprung every one of Dorish's hoodlums that ever got caught. Until he started hitting the bottle. Then Dorish cut him loose. He signed his own death warrant when he shot off his mouth and offered to testify before the Crime Committee."

He looked at Warsaw. "Did you get a peek at the stuff he was trying to peddle?"

Warsaw said, "No. I was just the—what you call it?—the go-between. I was supposed to bring Hardy to him. I got out of the car and went into the station and brought Hardy back with me. In the meantime, somebody must have got in the car with Brennan and—" He couldn't even finish the sentence.

Franklin said, "Did you two ride all over Chicago with both windows rolled up tight?"

Warsaw said, "No. Both windows were down all the time. Whoever got in and . . . They must have rolled them up."

"Okay. You guys will have to come down to headquarters. We'll want to get the facts down in black and white. You got a car, Hardy?"

I said, "Yes. Around the corner. Warsaw can ride with me."

Franklin gave a signal to his aides and they poured over the Chevvy like attendants at a service station. Flash bulbs popped and technicians lugged their various pieces of equipment across the sidewalk. We left them then and I led Warsaw down Adams and around the corner to where my car was parked.

Bertha opened the door when she saw me coming and gave me a smile as wide as her face. Her voice was frightened. "Am I glad to see you! I thought he'd found me again."

"Who?"

"Dale Mester!"

"Holy cow!" I said. "When did you see him?"

"Just a few moments before you came out of the station and came

past the car. I wanted to tell you about it then but you didn't stop."

I got in the car behind the wheel and Warsaw got in on the other side, with Bertha sitting between us. I introduced Warsaw. He nodded politely but he didn't say anything. Then I explained, "Miss Macaulay is the daughter of Bill Macaulay. She was working at Clem Dorish's De Luxe Cocktail Lounge, giving Mac tips on The Outfit's operations. Much of it was in the stuff that Mel Brennan was trying to peddle."

Warsaw said, his lips trembling, "The Outfit? A girl was spying on The Outfit? Wasn't that terribly dangerous?"

"She quit," I said, "as of last night." Then I turned to the girl. "Mel Brennan won't peddle the evidence to anybody now. The cops got him. He's dead."

She put her hand over her mouth and sucked in her breath. "You think Dale Mester killed him, too?"

"He was on the spot. He's one of Dorish's hoods. That always adds up to making him our number one suspect."

CHAPTER NINE

THE THREE OF US drove down to headquarters. Warsaw and I both dictated our stories to a plainclothesman who took it down in shorthand and then had it transcribed for us to sign. I told Ben Franklin that Bertha had seen Dale Mester walk past our car just moments before Warsaw and I had dicovered Brennan's dead body.

He said, "We got plants set up near all of Mester's and Bergen's known hangouts. If they show up at any of those places we'll nab them. Now, of course, Mester knows we're on his tail after the affair at Barney's. The chances are Mester and Bergen may try to fly the coop. But the chances are better that they'll crawl into a hide-out they've never used before and lay low till they get a chance to skip town. We'll have to work on it."

I said, "Think this one ties up with the narcotics racket?"

Warsaw gave me a funny look and Franklin said, "No. I think Macaulay was bumped off to keep his mouth shut about the operations of The Outfit. Brennan beat The Outfit's boys to the carbon copy that Miss Macaulay had. So they bumped him off. It adds. When we get Mester and Bergen we got the guys."

I said, "Where does that leave Hal Benton?"

He said, with raw humor, "On a slab in the morgue."

We left headquarters and I asked Warsaw if I could give him a lift. He said he was going home so I offered to drop him off. We left him off on the sidewalk in front of the Warsaw Printing Company. He shook hands with Bertha and said he hoped he'd see her again soon and then vanished into the side door that led up to his office and apartment.

I drove around the block, looking for a parking place. There was a lot of traffic and the neon signs of the honky-tonks gave Skid Row a carnival air. I wasn't in a carnival mood. Mel Brennan's death didn't mean much to me because I hadn't even known the guy. But

I knew he'd been killed by the same guy or guys that killed Mac and I wanted them. The Outfit was behind them; and Clem Dorish was the Big Boy of The Outfit. The logical thing to do was to see what made him tick.

I parked the car on a side street under a street light. "I'm going to the DeLuxe," I told her. "I got to see a man about a murder."

She put her hands over mine. "Don't do it, Jeff."

It was the first time she'd ever called me Jeff. I wondered if it meant anything, or whether she was just being cagey. Then she said, "You'll never get out of there alive."

I rolled up both windows and pushed the buttons down. "Don't get out of this car and don't roll the windows down to talk to anybody. Anybody. Got that?"

She said, "Take care of yourself, Jeff."

I walked down to Madison and went west till I came to the DeLuxe. The neon was blazing all around the joint and the posters of the nearly naked women in the recess of the entrance were all framed with the stuff. The photo of Betty Conroy was still there.

I went in. The place was dimly lighted and all I could see at the horseshoe bar and the tables were the silhouettes of figures and faces. A musician in a blue spot was improvising on a piano near the west wall, just away from the cigarette stand and cashier's cage. The murmur of talk and the shrill laughter of girls almost lost the sound of the piano.

I went over to the check room. A bosomy blonde with a slash of lipstick for a mouth, gave me an artificial smile as I gave her my hat. She bent over farther than she had to in order to pick up a check and hand it to me. She'd given me a free peek down into the valley.

I took out my billfold and took out a five. Her smile got wider. I said, "Where do I find Clem Dorish?"

The smile froze. She said, "He ain't here."

"Where's his office? I can wait."

"You a copper?"

"I'm not a copper."

The smile came back, tentatively, and her eyes watched my hand monkey around with the five. "Where's his office?"

"Upstairs," she said, "through the door by the cigar stand. But

he ain't here now. He don't come in the place till about midnight."

I folded the five and stuck it down the front of her. Her flesh was warm and sticky.

"I'll bet you're an Indian giver," she said. "You'll try to get it back. With interest."

I said, "I'd pay extra for that if I wanted it."

I moved through the tables on the soft carpet and nobody paid any attention to me. Until I got to the door and my hand on the knob.

"Mr. Hardy. Mr. Jeff Hardy."

It was a girl's voice. And she had spoken my name loudly enough as if she was wanting someone else to notice me. I turned around.

A girl had just come up to the cigarette stand and was taking the straps of her cigarette tray from around her bare shoulders. She smiled at me and said, "Mr. Hardy," again, loud enough for everybody in the place to hear it.

A broad-shouldered guy with a pug nose whirled around from his seat at the bar and gave me a quick once-over. He got up and went past us through the door without looking aside.

The girl was damned near naked. She had black stockings on her legs that reached up to the curve of her buttocks. The skirt of her dress would have made a good ruffle for a bed and the scanty hugged her bodice so tightly that she didn't need straps to hold it up. She had plenty.

She wasn't ordinary looking any more. Her brown hair had gold highlights in it and her face was good enough for a beauty cream ad.

Miss Rosie O'Grady looked a lot different than she had when I'd seen her at the Narcotics Bureau. To cover my surprise I reached out to her tray for a pack of cigarettes.

She covered my hand with hers and gave me a provocative look. "Not that package." She lowered her voice to a whisper. "That pack's worth a dollar seventy-five. Take this one. On the house." She gave me an identical pack from the front of the tray.

She smiled at me. "The others I slit with a razor blade and stick a cap of heroin inside. A dollar and a half for the cap and two bits for the cigarettes. That way it's two profits for The Outfit."

"And misery for some poor bastard that's got enough of it now." I walked past her and grabbed the door knob again and pulled it.

There was a little hallway with a stairway going up. In the hall the broad-shouldered guy who had been at the bar, was leaning against the wall, doing nothing. He gave me a quick grin out of his ugly mug and said, "Hi."

I figured he was a muscle man and I was going to get the works. I set myself for it. "Dorish's office upstairs?"

He said, "Could be."

I put my foot on the lower step. He didn't do anything. Just stood there. I went up the stairway. I looked back. He was still standing there. Doing nothing.

I went down the hall to the only door. I grabbed the knob and pushed the door open.

Inside were a man, a woman, and a dog.

The dog was growling deep down in his throat. At me. He was on the end of a steel chain and the other end was wrapped around the front leg of a walnut desk. I didn't worry about him.

The woman was sitting on the edge of the desk with a lot of nylons showing. She was blonde. She was embarrassed because she was zipping up the front of her skin-tight dress and the zipper was stuck.

The man wore scarlet slacks and a yellow shirt and his face was the color of wet mud. The gold key chain dangled nearly to his knees.

Elio said, with that bird glitter in his eyes, "Don't you ever knock, you nosy bastard?"

"Turn about's fair play. The last time you called on me you didn't knock. I returned your call—and your roll of nickels."

Ella Granger said, "What do you want?"

"Clem Dorish."

"He isn't here."

"I can see that. If he were, he'd get awfully mad at his honey pie being pawed by one of his hired hands."

She said, "Get out!" and walked behind the desk. Elio went around the desk and stood beside her. I expected one of them to make a dive for a desk drawer and a gun. Neither one did.

The dog got up. He was a black Doberman. His hide was as black and shiny as a stove-pipe. His fangs were clean and white. They could tear a man's throat loose. He growled at me, deep in his belly,

and then he went behind the desk, dragging his chain behind him.

I went closer to the desk. Elio moved to the far end and then came around it. The dog followed him till the chain caught on the end of the desk and stopped. I grinned. The dog couldn't get his fangs in me unless he had brains enough to unwrap himself from around the desk. That I doubted.

I grinned at Elio. "I'm sure of one thing now, you rotten son of a bitch. You're the guy that drove the car for Dale Mester and Lou Bergen when they gunned Mac. I came to pay you off."

His dark face looked like wet liver. The eyes burned holes in my face. That hopped-up glitter. He stepped toward me, the thin line of hair on his upper lip glistening with sweat. "You're poppin' off, ain't you, Sonny?"

His toe came up at me. I sidestepped. His leg went high, like a ballet dancer's. I grabbed it. Twisted it. He squealed with pain. Threw himself sideways against the front of the desk. I lost my grip on his shoe. He squirmed and came back like a cat. My left hand crashed against his chin. His head went back. Blood squirted out of his mouth. His eyes glazed. Then they flared violence. He rushed me.

I gave him my right knee in the groin. Hard. He squealed and dropped his hands to try to hold in the pain. While he was bent over I dug in my pocket for the roll of nickels.

The dog was raising hell, throwing himself as far as the chain would let him come. Barking like crazy. Foam was coming out of his mouth. His neck hair stood up straight. His fangs were yearning to get my throat.

Ella Granger was standing still. Her eyes were popping out of her head. I thought she was going to be sick. "Watch this," I said, "it might come in handy sometime." I had the roll of nickels balled up inside my right hand and I gave it to Elio. With every one of my hundred and ninety pounds behind it. I felt something give. The pain made me think it was my knuckles. But it was a handful of Elio's teeth. I'd hit him with his mouth open. One of his teeth had gone through his upper lip. He was bleeding like a stuck dog.

The dog smelled the blood and went berserk. He leaped against the chain so hard the desk moved an inch. Foam dropped out of his mouth onto the carpet.

Ella Granger was going around the other end of the desk. She stooped to untie the chain. I said, "Hold it, baby!" and slapped her face so hard her teeth rattled. She sat down on the floor. She whimpered. She swayed back and forth on the carpet, like she was off her rocker.

I didn't pay any attention to the dog. I went back to Elio. He was leaning on the desk, slobbering blood all over it. I grabbed a handful of hair and bounced his head on the desk top. I heard his teeth crunch into the wood. Again and again I crashed his bloody mug into the walnut. The red stuff flowed across the blotter. He tried to support himself and turn on me. His hands slipped in the gore. His face fell on the desk again. This time the starch went out of his body. He fell to the floor. His ugly, blood-smeared face stared up at me, sightless. His nose was broken. Blood streamed out of both nostrils. His mouth was a mess. Cut lips, broken teeth, saliva and gore.

I threw the roll of nickels on the desk top and grinned at Ella Granger. "When your lover comes to, baby, tell him all I wanted to do was give him back his two bucks. And get even a little for Mac."

I went to the door and looked back. The blonde was sitting on the floor, fumbling with the loop of the steel chain. I slipped my gun from under my armpit. "Let him loose, Baby. I need target practice. But Dorish won't like it if you do. That's a pedigreed pooch. I'd hate to kill a dog like that. Must have cost him a hundred bucks."

She quit fumbling with the chain and stared at me.

I was in the open doorway when footsteps slithered on the carpet. A woman burst past me in the doorway. She didn't have much on. A little ruffle of skirt and a top with not much more.

Miss Rosie O'Grady ran into the room. She went to Elio and knelt on the floor and lifted his head in her lap and started cooing over the wounded gladiator. I spat on Dorish's carpet and slammed the door.

When I went down the steps the broad-shouldered guy was still at the bottom. He was leaning against the wall, doing nothing. He gave me a quizzical grin. "Nice evening."

"So far."

"That damn dog must of been riled up. The room up there is soundproof but I heard him raising hell when you opened the door.

Dorish thinks the world and all of that dog. He'd hate to think that anyone upset the hound."

I had a funny idea. "Does he keep him here all the time?"

"No. Brings him in about nine o'clock every night from some kennel out in Oak Park. He stays here till the joint closes and then they take him back to the kennel." He moved away from the wall. "How's Rosie doing?"

I spat on Dorish's carpet again. "Okay. She's whispering sweet nothings in Elio's ear. Too bad he can't hear her. I had to kick his teeth in." I thought that would get a rise out of him.

It didn't. He leaned up against the wall again. "Clever girl, Rosie."

"If you like female 'pushers'."

He froze his smile. "Well, I'll be seeing you around. So long."

I made a tentative step forward and put my hand on the door knob. He didn't move. I opened the door and went out into the noisy clamor of the DeLuxe. I picked my way through the tables and went out the front door. The bosomy hat check girl was the only one who paid any attention to my going. To everyone else, I was just another paying guest on the way out.

I went back to the car. Bertha Macaulay was still in it. I got in and drove down Madison, glad to be out in the open with all my vital organs in the right places.

She seemed fidgety. "It took you a long time."

"I had to see a guy. I owed him two bucks. I paid him back."

She shivered. "Elio?"

She put her hand on my arm and I trembled like a football hero being petted by his prom date. "You've got to be more careful, Jeff."

She was worried about me, and it made me happy to know it. I was beginning to wonder if this was love.

We were crossing an intersection and she caught a number on a store front. "You should have turned back there. You went by Damen."

I said, "On purpose. Tonight, Baby, you're staying with me."

She squirmed around in the seat. Fast. "But . . ."

I watched her blush. Then I said, "You keep telling me to be careful. That goes for you, too. Remember, you read the carbon

copy of the evidence Mac had. I didn't. You got to be more careful. Right?"

"I guess you're right. But, Jeff . . ." Her face was crimson. "I could go to a hotel."

"The Outfit could get to you in a hotel easier than they could on South Damen." I reassured her. "My bed's four feet six wide and six feet long. There's plenty of room."

She didn't say anything. But she was thinking plenty.

CHAPTER TEN

THE NEXT MORNING every muscle in my body ached. I can't recommend a davenport as a vehicle for a night's rest; especially when the davenport is five and a half feet long and my frame is nearly six. My neck seemed rusty when I tried to turn it. There was a welt of pain in the muscles around my shoulder blades and my left ear felt like it was tied to the side of my skull.

I felt better when I saw her. She was standing in the doorway of my bedroom. She had evidently just gotten out of my bed. Her eyes were sleepy and her golden-brown hair was in disarray but she looked as cute as a new nickel. She had on my pajamas. The tops hit her around the shoulders and hung down to her knees. The bottoms had been rolled up but now they were folded under her tiny feet on the floor. She looked like a little girl playing grown-up in her mother's clothes.

She said, "I'm sorry I had to take your bed."

I said, "So am I." That didn't sound right and my face got red. She laughed a little and came walking into the living room, the bottoms of my pajama legs trailing nearly a foot behind her on the floor. She tripped over them. I caught her under my arms. I couldn't help but feel the softness of her under the broadcloth. She laughed and squirmed a little. When she was upright she looked into my eyes. "You're nice."

I held her close. I paid no attention to her body. My target was her lips. High voltage seemed to flow through every fiber of my body at the contact. She didn't fight. She didn't act like a prude. Circumstances had caused her to spend the night in a man's bed, in his pajamas. She accepted the circumstances. Her lips were warm on mine, but they didn't linger. She held me away and said, "By the time you're shaved, I'll have breakfast." She went into the bedroom to take off the pajamas and put on her own clothes. I went out into the hall to get the morning paper.

I propped it up on a shelf in the bathroom next to the mirror. The headline said: POLICE SEEK SLAYERS. There was a picture of Dale Mester, the "baby bandit", and another of Lou Bergen. The story pointed out that police were still searching for them. As alleged members of The Outfit they were being sought for the killing of William Macaulay and Mel Brennan. The story said witnesses (me) had identified them tentatively as the gunmen who had shot Macaulay and another witness had placed Mester near the scene of Brennan's murder only a few moments after the killing had occurred. Police stated that both Macaulay and Brennan had been murdered to silence them so they could not testify to the Crime Committee on operations of The Outfit.

The phone rang. I answered it with shaving cream all over my face. It was Lieutenant Ben Franklin. He sounded like he hadn't had breakfast. His voice rasped like a file. "I guess you thought you were smart as hell."

I didn't get it. I said so.

"Out at the DeLuxe last night. What did you gain by pushing Elio's face in?"

"I owed him two bucks. I paid him back. His teeth got in the way."

"I know. You proved you're a tough guy. And you also advertised to The Outfit that we're trying to close in."

"Advertise hell! It's in all the papers."

"The papers always accuse The Outfit of everything that happens in Chicago. That's nothing new. But when you barge in and start throwing fists they know which way the wind blows. All you did was put Elio out of circulation. They took twelve stitches in his upper lip and he lost four teeth."

"What did Rosie O'Grady lose?"

"Huh?"

"A known pusher is peddling dope at the DeLuxe. Selling caps hidden in cigarettes. Out in the open. With a broad-shouldered guy hanging around the edges. And when Elio was swallowing some of his own blood Rosie ran in and cooed over him. What the hell kind of a Narcotics Bureau have we got? Who's running the Bureau—Dorish and The Outfit?"

"That's Haley's business, not mine."

"It's mine, too. I know damn well Mac was killed on orders of

the dope ring. We're not going to find them treating known pushers like our maiden aunts. We got to get tough."

"We will. Not you. I've told you before; murder is our business, not yours. Keep out of it. If you don't we'll take steps to make you. Got that?"

"I got that. You any closer to Mester and Bergen than you were last night?"

"No. But we'll get them. Give us time."

"I got no time to spare. I'm going to get them. And don't try to stop me. Remember, Mac was my partner." I hung up the phone.

I gave her the gun when I left for the office. It was a .38 revolver I'd carried for about a year and put away in a drawer in the kitchen when I'd bought the one I carried under my armpit.

I said, "When I leave here, put the door on the chain. Keep it on. Don't answer the door unless they identify themselves. You can answer the phone but don't fall for any fake messages that I've been run over by a truck or fished out of Lake Michigan. On second thought don't even answer the phone. Somebody might tumble to the fact I brought you here—and then take steps."

She smiled at me. "Aren't you being a little—sensational, Jeff?"

I said, "Mac's dead. Brennan's dead. Two weeks ago we'd have said that was sensational, even fantastic. It wasn't. These guys play for keeps. I don't know how Hal Benton crossed 'em, but he got it, too. They're all wrapped up in this somehow."

She pouted. A very pretty pout. "You're going to lock me up here all day?"

"This is better than the morgue."

"I could go with you. Then they . . ."

"I've got work to do." I opened the door and went out and stood in the hall until she slipped the safety chain into place.

At nine o'clock I was in my office. *Miss July* smiled at me from the calendar. The office was stuffy; the day promised to return to its sultry pattern. I turned on the fan with the switch at the door between the offices and *Miss July* stood out from the wall. The breeze made her wiggle like she was doing a dance on the sand. I emptied the drip pan under the icebox. Mac's bowling bag was still there beside it, behind the swing board.

I sent out some bills, wrote out checks and mailed them in payment of our own. Then I spent a fruitless hour going over both offices with painstaking care. I looked in every drawer; every folder in the file cabinets; under the desk blotter; in the magazines on the table in the outer office; in a batch of *Tribunes* which Mac had piled on top of his desk. The search was fruitless. I couldn't find a thing that resembled evidence that Mac would want to present to the Crime Committee.

It wasn't until Lieutenant Ben Franklin sent one of his stooges over to the office with Macaulay's personal stuff that I got my big idea. There was his billfold, a little black memorandum book with some notations in it; a handful of change and a ring of keys. The detective said they had tried all the keys, either in the office or in Mac's furnished room out on the North Side. They hadn't found anything. I could give the stuff back to Miss Macaulay; they hadn't been able to locate her. I said I would.

The minute I saw that ring of keys I figured out where Mac had hidden the stuff he was to give to the Crime Committee. One of the keys was for Mac's locker at the *Bowl*. I knew now why Mac had gotten his bowling bag from the *Bowl* the afternoon before he was to testify before the Crime Committee. He had picked his locker at the *Bowl* as the place to hide his evidence. There wasn't room with his bowling bag in it so he had carried it back to the office and hidden his evidence in the locker.

I left the office, ran down the stairs to the street and hurried down to the *Bowl*. There were a few guys in the cocktail lounge and a few in the coffee shop but there wasn't anybody in the bowling alley. Except an old man who was running a polishing machine on the alleys. I asked him the number of Bill Macaulay's locker.

He looked it up in a book he got behind a counter of the bowling desk. "Two-o-three," he said. "It ain't got no house key. He had his own lock."

I said, "I've got the key. But I didn't know what number it was."

I went down the areaway behind the twenty-four alleys and walked into the locker room. I searched out two hundred and three and my hands trembled as I put the key in the padlock.

I opened the door. All the starch went out of me. There wasn't any evidence. No papers of any kind. I wasn't as smart as I thought.

There was only a bowling ball and a pair of worn bowling shoes.

At nine o'clock that night I parked the car across the street from the De Luxe Cocktail Lounge. It was Saturday night and the neons of Skid Row and the girl joints were blazing and carnival spirit was in the air. The slummers from out of town and Lake Shore Drive were coming west to see how the seamy side lived.

Bertha Macaulay sat beside me, her face turned away from the window. There wasn't any sense in letting some frequenter of the De Luxe see her here; the singer of torchant tunes who had failed to show up at the De Luxe last night, but whose picture still adorned the billboard.

She was puzzled. "Why park here?" she asked. "You talk about danger and then park as close to it as you can get. Like you're inviting it."

"I got an idea from that damn dog. Maybe that's the way we can put the finger on Mester and Bergen."

"I don't see what Dorish's dog's got to do with it."

Before I could answer a battered station wagon double-parked in front of the De Luxe. "I had a notion about that dog. They deliver him here every night about this time. There he is."

A guy got out of the station wagon and I got a good look at him in the glare of car headlights that passed him. He was young, about twenty-one or two. He was tall, with a gangling, shuffling walk, as if he didn't have good control of his legs, or his brain. He wore nondescript blue pants, a tan sport shirt with the tail outside. He had no hat and his hair was uncombed. His face was a pasty white as if he never saw sun. He didn't look very bright.

He went around to the other side of the car and opened the back door. I heard a steel chain rattle on the street. Then the guy stooped over and picked up a robe or piece of tarp that had fallen out. He tossed it back into the rear seat of the station wagon.

Then he said something to the dog. The black Doberman leaped out. He went for the sidewalk, straining at the leash, pulling the guy behind him. I could see the flashing white of his fangs from across the street. The fangs he'd been eager to sink into my hide the night before. The young fellow led him into the De Luxe.

Five minutes later the guy came back, without the dog. He got into the station wagon and drove away. He didn't seem to be in any

hurry. He turned north to Washington Boulevard and then headed west on U.S. 20. The traffic signals were set for 30 miles an hour and he timed his speed to make them all. He drove as if he had traveled the route many times. There was a lot of traffic and I could stay right on his tail without any suspicion.

He turned north on Harlem Avenue and stayed on it to Grand. He turned west to stay on U.S. 20. After a couple miles he turned off on a gravel road that headed northwest. A sign on a telephone pole had an arrow pointing to *Kenwood Kennels.* I drove past the intersection and then made a U-turn in the middle of the road and came back. The station wagon's headlights were topping a hill half a mile ahead.

I followed slowly. The station wagon turned straight east and went through a wide gate up a tree-lined road toward a lighted house. I went on by. The sign over the gate said *Kenwood Kennels.* I drove half a mile and then came back. I passed the gate and topped the lip of a hill. I stopped the car.

"Now," I said, "we play my hunch."

I turned off the lights and got out of the car. I let her out. "Aren't you going to lock it?" she asked.

I gave her a grin that she couldn't see in the darkness. "No. We might want to get away in a hurry and we'd have no time for keys."

She said, "What gives?"

"Lieutenant Franklin hasn't been able to flush Bergen or Mester out into the open. They've had plainclothesmen planted in or near all their known hangouts. After I found out that Dorish's dog is brought into the De Luxe every night, I figured the kennels might offer a good hide-out for Dorish's men."

"Let's go," she said.

"You got your gun?" I asked.

"In my handbag." She was puffing a little, trying to keep up with me, as I turned into the gate. There was a line of Chinese elms along the left side of the road, young stuff without much foliage, but it provided enough cover to hide us from the house. We kept to that side of the road for the hundred feet before the gravel swept farther to the left under a portico. The station wagon was parked under it. There weren't any lights in the side of the house but illumination from a back window shone out into the grassy space. I thought it

was funny I didn't hear any dogs barking. Then I figured that Dorish's pooch was the only one that ever boarded here. The joint was a natural hide-out for any of The Outfit's boys that were too hot in the opinion of the law.

"We want to find Mester and Bergen. We can't do it on the outside. Let's go."

We reached the window where the light was streaming out. I bent over and peered under the bottom of the drawn shade. I didn't get to see what was inside. She uttered a strangled cry in her throat. I started to turn around. Something hard was pushed into the small of my back and a harder voice said, "We don't like snoopers, Mister."

If Bertha was frightened, she had no intention of letting the gunman know a thing about it. You had to admire the plucky kid.

I tried to turn around but more pressure on the gun stopped that idea. I said, "We had car trouble. I want to borrow your phone, if you don't mind."

The voice said, "Nuts! You're a cop. I can tell by the smell."

She started to say something. He said, "Shut up, Sister!"

He squeezed the gun a little harder and pushed me in the direction of a door. "The telephone's inside, Bub." He gave a little laugh. He knew I wasn't interested in telephones. "Don't try any funny business. I'll crack your skull!"

I opened the door and went inside. She followed me and the guy with the gun brought up the rear.

The room was ordinary, the floor was plain boards; there was an oak table and a couple of chairs. In front of a television set that must have cost a thousand dollars was a huge chair. Sitting in it was a huge man.

He switched off the television set and then his belly started to shake as he laughed at us. His head was bald and his face was the color of dough; so smooth shaven that I doubted if he ever had to shave; it looked so lifeless no hair would grow. His clothes were good but looked shapeless on his huge bulk. This man was big—he was plenty big.

He stopped laughing and his eyes retreated into the bags of flesh under his eyes. "I've been expecting you, Hardy. I don't think it took a smart guy to figure out that by tailing the station wagon that

delivered the dog you'd find me. I expected your visit long before this."

"I wasn't looking for you, Big Boy." I put a sneer into the title. He didn't seem to mind.

"So you do know who I am?" He was a little proud of his status of infamy.

"Sure," I said. "You're the guy that makes The Outfit click. You're Clem Dorish!"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE MAN WITH THE GUN was the young fellow who had delivered the Doberman to the De Luxe. He still didn't look very bright.

Dorish made a signal with his fat hand. "Put that away. We won't need it. Mr. Hardy is a sensible man. I am sure of it, even with his transparent ruse of wanting to use my telephone." His eyes didn't flicker, but there was a change in his voice; as if the inane preliminaries were over and he could now get down to busines. "Just exactly why did you come here, Mr. Hardy?"

"I want Dale Mester and Lou Bergen, Dorish."

"*You* want them?" His inflection underlined the word. "You are not a policeman, Mr. Hardy."

"They killed my partner, Dorish. The cops haven't found them. I will."

"You have a warrant, Mr. Hardy?" He was laughing again.

"I don't need a warrant. All I need is two fists and a gun."

"You need a warrant to search a private dwelling for two persons who aren't here."

"They work for you. You know where they are. What would be a better hiding place than a suburban kennel—with no dogs?"

"No dogs? Well, now." He turned his fat face to look at the young fellow. "The kennels are over the hill. How many dogs do we have now, Joe?"

Joe said, "Sixty-seven, counting the two new litters."

"I don't want a dog. I want Mester and Bergen. They killed Mac. I saw them. Maybe Mester killed Brennan. That's none of by business. I want 'em for killing Mac."

Dorish turned his eyes on me and then they drifted over Bertha. "Mester and Bergen both work for me. I do not deny that. But in a legitimate capacity. They are valued employees."

"Legitimate? Vice, dope, numbers, policy, hi-jacking?"

His expression didn't change. "We call them sales representatives. The organization you term The Outfit operates only legitimate enterprises. It has been many years since we have been outside the law. Your error is the common one; the police need a whipping boy for every crime they cannot solve. The Outfit is charged with everything."

I was still thinking about Mester and Bergen. "Sales representatives? What do they sell? Protection? If the fruit dealer doesn't buy protection, they throw carbon bisulphide in their carts. If the restaurants and the service stations don't buy it, rocks are hurled through their windows."

Dorish's voice was very gentle. "Insurance happens to be one of our many enterprises. We operate a brewery, a printing plant, a can company. We try to be self-sufficient. We make beer and cans to package it. Our printer makes the labels. Our truck line delivers to our own distributors."

I grinned. "And if they don't buy your beer, they can't rent your buildings. If they own their own place and don't want your beer one of your trucks goes out of control and smashes through their front windows. Right?"

"You seem to have swallowed the line of reasoning taken by the police, Mr. Hardy."

I said, "One of your sales representatives puzzles me, Dorish. What does Elio sell? I know he's one of your Number One pushers. And Rosie O'Grady peddles the stuff in your De Luxe. Do you call that legitimate?"

His eyes sparked for the first time. He was on the verge of speaking. He stopped and licked his fat lips. "Elio is a very impulsive person."

"He's not as impulsive as he was, Dorish. He won't eat any corn on the cob for quite some time."

Dorish said, "I might offer some advice, Mr. Hardy. If I were you I'd curb my curiosity. I would surmise it would be much healthier. You might suffer if you persist."

"From you or Elio?"

He spread his fat arms wide. "I was just offering an observation, Mr. Hardy."

"I have an observation to make, too. Did you know that one of your sales representatives—Lou Bergen—is sleeping with Ella Granger? Did you know that she also submits to pawing by your Number One pusher, Elio, in your own office?"

His reaction was unexpected. He looked at me quizzically for a long moment and then he gave himself over to laughter. His body shook the big chair. It proved one thing. Dorish wasn't paying Ella Granger's bills. His money hadn't furnished the swank apartment on North Clark Street. No man can laugh as Dorish did when he is informed he's been a sucker for a babe.

"Do you have any more gossip, Mr. Hardy? If not—"

I said, "I wanted Mester and Bergen. I still want them. But if they were in this house when I came, they're gone now. You've taken care of that. We are free to go?"

"But, of course. I have no desire to detain either you or Miss Macaulay."

I sucked in my breath. He was open with his knowledge that my companion was the daughter of Bill Macaulay. He didn't call her Miss Conroy. I wondered if he had known it all the time.

We went to the door. I opened it and looked back at Dorish. He said, "You should learn new techniques of tailing, Mr. Hardy. When Joe returned he said you were following him. He gave your license number. And although our gate is always open, it is also protected, shall we say, with a very expensive electronic gadget. I knew the moment you and Miss Macaulay walked through that gate."

He chuckled as he watched the reaction on my face and then he added new inflection to his voice, "Don't you want to use my telephone before you go, Mr. Hardy? Wasn't that what you came for?"

I said, "Go to hell!" and we walked out the door into the night.

As we walked over the grass toward the drive she took my arm. "You might say they operate like a Gestapo. They know every move you make before you make it."

I had to agree with that. Dorish had treated me like a little kid; as if he expected to outgeneral me at every turn. Dorish probably regarded me with no more respect than he did the driver of the station wagon.

That gave me an idea. As we left the grassy space and walked

around the curve of the gravel drive the station wagon was still parked under the portico. "Maybe he isn't so damned smart, after all."

We reached the shelter of the young trees, where occupants of the house couldn't see us walking along the road to the gate. I said, walking with her, "Think you can drive the car back?"

She looked at me in the darkness. There was hesitation, but no fright in her voice. "Sure. What are you going to do?"

"I think I'll hitchhike a ride. Unless I miss my guess Dorish will send a messenger to either Mester or Bergen, or both of them, to change hide-outs because I've been noseying around. I'm positive now they're not here but Dorish knows where they are. He might send the moron with the station wagon. If he does, I intend to be in it."

She stopped. "That will be dangerous, Jeff."

"That's where you come in. You take the car. The minute you reach a telephone, call Lieutenant Franklin or anybody else in Homicide. Tell them who you are and that I'm hitchhiking a ride in the station. Give them the license number. They can put it on the short-wave and in ten minutes every patrol car in Chicago and Cook County will know where I am."

She came over to me in the dark. "Be careful, Jeff." She reached up and put her lips on my mouth. I held her close.

"I will."

She laughed. "What is the license number, Jeff?"

"68058. Now hurry. If Dorish has an electric eye or something rigged on that gate, they'll be thinking it's taking us a long time to reach it."

She moved away down the drive. I could hear her shoes swishing in the gravel. I ran to the shelter of the trees and started along the line of trunks toward the house.

The station wagon still stood under the portico. I went deeper into the trees until I was beyond the corner of the house, with the portico and the station wagon between me and the house. I studied the gloom for evidence of movement. I saw none. I ran across the grass and hugged my body against a pillar of the portico. There was still no sound.

I bent my body over and took the two steps necessary to reach the side of the station wagon. I touched the door handle and twisted it. The back door opened with a tiny squeak of sound. I climbed in, crouched over; my hands fumbled with the folded tarp on the floor. I pulled the door shut; the latch caught with a faint click. I pulled the tarp over me and laid down on the floor, my body cramped in the narrow space.

It seemed like a half hour to my cramped muscles but it couldn't have been more than ten minutes when I heard a door open. There were rapid footsteps; a young man's, and the heavier tread of a slow, big man.

The front door of the car opened and the car swayed as somebody slid behind the wheel and then the door slammed. Dorish's voice said, "Do it just like I tell you. Got it right?"

The moron said, "Yeah." The rest of their conversation was lost in the roar of the motor and the deadening tarp that covered me. The car started with a jerk and my body swayed against the bottom of the seat, the steel digging into my spine. I caught the grunt of pain before it got out.

I heard the spurt of gravel hitting under the fenders as we went down the gravel drive. I felt a left turn. Then the spurt of the gravel changed to the bump-bump-bump as we traveled a hard road. We stopped still after ten minutes, presumably for a traffic light, because the clamor of traffic was all around us. We turned left and traveled less than a block before we stopped again. This time I could hear the ringing of a bell and the clatter of train wheels. I knew exactly where I was; at the railroad crossing on Harlem Avenue, just south of Grand.

Within a short time we turned left in heavy traffic and I knew we were on Washington Boulevard, headed east. There were frequent stops, evidently for traffic lights, and then a turn to the right.

I heard the noise of a street car rumbling by swiftly across our path. We turned left. I felt the bump of car tracks under the tires. We were on West Madison. Finally we made a right turn and traveled a few blocks. More car tracks. South Halsted. Suddenly the station wagon swerved to the right and stopped.

The weight of the driver shifted as he slid across to the seat to

the curb side. The door opened and banged shut and I heard footsteps across the sidewalk. I jerked my head up from the cover of the tarpaulin. The sudden movement sent pain rocketing through my stiff muscles. The brightness of street lights hurt my eyes.

The young fellow who didn't look too bright was climbing the steps of a dilapidated brownstone house. I recognized the nondescript pants and the bare head. He disappeared inside.

I got out of the station wagon and crossed the sidewalk. I mentally cussed the cops. They hadn't tailed the license number. There wasn't a sign of a moving car on the street. I leaped up the steps of the brownstone house and opened the door. A musty, unused smell hit me the moment I got inside. The hall floor was bare and the row of tin mailboxes hadn't held any mail for years.

The guy that wasn't too bright was climbing a stairway. He didn't even look. I ran down the hall, keeping close to the wall in the darkness. I went up the steps two at a time. I got to the top and peered around the end of the stairs. The boy that wasn't too bright was just going in a door on the right side of the hall.

I waited till he shut the door. I tip-toed up the hall, my right hand close to my armpit. I got to the door. I listened. I took hold of the knob. I twisted it. It wasn't locked. I got my gun in my hand and then kicked the door open and jumped inside.

The room was dimly lighted by the off-and-on flicker of an electric sign across the street that shone through the raised window. I saw the dark stripes of a fire escape railing shadowed on the lace curtains. There wasn't a living thing in the room.

I went to the window and peered down the fire escape. The guy that wasn't too bright had been bright enough to get out of that room. He leaped off the bottom step of the fire escape and ran into the arms of two guys coming around the corner. He fought like hell until one of the guys slugged him. Then he laid down on the sidewalk.

I grinned. Bertha's call to the cops had let them tail the station wagon. They'd got there a little late; but in time. They'd staked out the station wagon. Now they'd start looking for me.

I got away from the window and went over to the wall and turned

on the light. It wasn't much of a room. The carpet was worn and somebody had crushed cigarette stubs out on it so much that it had the look of burnt toast. There was a bed, unmade; a dresser with a cracked mirror, and a costumer that held a half dozen wire coat hangers. There was a table on the right wall. On top of it was a copy of the last edition of the *Tribune* with pictures of Dale Mester and Lou Bergen in the middle of the front page. There were two sheets of waxed paper like sandwiches come in; a few crumbs on the table top. Next to the table was a metal wastebasket with red roses stenciled all around it. The roses were having a tough time trying to inject a note of gaiety into the room.

I said there wasn't a living thing in the room. There wasn't. The guy sitting at the table looked like he might have fallen asleep while reading the paper. Except that he had a gun in his hand and a hole in his heart. Blood and filth smeared the *Tribune*.

He wore a blue tropical suit. The coat hung open and his belly touched the table and the red spot had soaked through a lot of his shirt. His hat had fallen off on the table and lay there, upside down. He was a sorry sight.

I felt his face. It was cold. I was glad of that. It proved that the guy who wasn't so bright hadn't killed him. It also proved that I hadn't killed him. He'd been dead a long time. Maybe twenty-four hours.

I got him by the hair and pulled his head back so I could see his features. He looked just like his picture in the *Tribune*. It was Dale Mester, the "baby bandit".

I didn't spend time feeling sorry for Mester. I thought of Mac, and I was mad as ever.

I patted around on him. He had another gun in his left armpit holster. I didn't touch it. I knew the cops wouldn't like that, and so I steered clear of it.

The wastebasket interested me. Somebody had burned five or six sheets of paper in it. The bottom was nearly filled with paper ashes. There was one scrap of paper that hadn't burned completely. I fished it out of there with great care.

Whatever had been burned was a carbon copy of something. The

handwriting was smeared a little, as carbon copies are when they've rubbed together.

There were only three words on the scrap I had, which was evidently the bottom corner of one of the pages. The three words were: *definite proof that.*

I would have known Bill Macaulay's handwriting anywhere. It gave me a peculiar feeling to see it here in this death chamber.

CHAPTER TWELVE

IT WAS TEN MINUTES before the cops got through trying all the doors in the old building and finally opened mine. Lieutenant Ben Franklin was in the lead and two plainclothesmen followed him into the room.

Franklin gave me a cold look and then he walked to the table. He put his gun in his holster. Then he pulled the dead man's head up by the hair and peered into the dead face. He let the head drop on the table. It sounded like he'd dropped a cantaloupe. He came over to me. "You got a nasty habit of creating corpses. I guess you think you're a smart bastard because you beat us to him."

I said, "Hell, Ben! Don't go off half-cocked. I didn't kill him."

He stared at me. "The goon we caught coming down the fire escape? Why would he kill Mester?"

"Neither one of us killed this baby," I said. "Mester's colder than a deep freeze. I'd bet he's been dead for nearly twnty-four hours."

Franklin inspected the room. He saw the waxed paper, the ashes in the wastebasket, the scrap of paper with the three words on it.

"Looks like he'd holed up here since last night. He got the newspapers. Thought he was due for a showdown and couldn't take it. So he bumped himself off. But before he did he protected The Outfit by burning up the carbon copy of Macaulay's stuff. Right?"

"You couldn't be more wrong, Ben."

"Huh?"

"Mester wasn't the type to bump himself off. He was a young guy that thought everybody but him was a sucker. He thought he was too smart for everybody else. I think Mester was killed because he had the nerve to try to shake down somebody in The Outfit because of the stuff he learned from Mac's evidence. He might have had the guts to try to blackmail Dorish himself. So The Outfit wipes Mester

off the books with a slug and destroys Mac's evidence. That's the way I figure it out."

Franklin didn't seem surprised because my explanation failed to agree with his. He pursed his lips and ran his fingers through his gray hair and again I got the fleeting resemblance to his namesake.

"Maybe you'd better tell me how you happened to find Mester's body."

I told him of my suspicion that Mester and Bergen might have used the kennels as a hide-out and how we had followed the station wagon to Dorish's Kenwood Kennels; how I had talked to Dorish and then hidden in the station wagon because I thought Dorish might try to warn both Mester and Bergen to seek sanctuary farther away from The Outfit's territory. How the driver came to the room, went through the window and down the fire escape into the arms of the cops.

Franklin said, "The guy we nabbed says Dorish sent him to tell Mester to give himself up to the cops; Mester hadn't killed either Macaulay or Brennan; the cops were just using The Outfit as the fall guy. As usual." He spat on the carpet.

"It looks to me that Dorish *knew* Mester was dead. The body hadn't been found and Dorish wanted to be damn sure that it was. He was smart enough to figure that I might follow the goon in the station wagon and if I did we might fall for the idea that Mester had killed himself. So far Dorish has been a damn smart cookie."

"He won't be so damn smart after we get through talking to him."

"What have you got to pin him down with? That he sent the goon to the room where Mester's body was? He'll say that Mester was one of his "sales representatives" and it was only natural that Mester would let him know his whereabouts. Also he's got the word of the messenger he sent that he was advising Mester to give himself up. I don't see how you can pin anything on Dorish. Not yet."

Franklin let breath out in a big, tired sigh. Then he turned to his aides and gave instructions that I couldn't hear. I went over to the group and he gave me a cold look. I said, "Mester's got two guns; the one in his hand and one in his holster. I'll gamble that

one of them killed Macaulay and the other killed Brennan."

"You still think Mester was killed as a frame to put the real killer in the clear? Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

"I think Mester helped kill Macaulay. I don't think he killed Brennan. But I think the guns will prove that he killed them both. That's why Mester was framed. All you got to do is compare the slugs."

"We got the slugs that killed your partner. We got the slugs that killed Brennan. The Crime Lab can run a microscopic check tonight. The spectograph will have to wait until tomorrow." He told his aides to hang around for the technicians and the coroner's men to show up. I rode down to headquarters with Franklin in the police car. He unbent enough to let me follow him into the Crime Laboratory.

He put both of Mester's guns on the lab table and told the guy in the white coat, "Run a physical and microscopic check on bullets from these two guns with the slugs taken out of Bill Macaulay and Mel Brennan. If you get anything positive, I'll be in my office."

It was ten minutes past midnight when we sat down in Franklin's office. He leaned back in his chair and rested his head on the back piece and closed his eyes. When he opened them he gave me a wry smile. "After twenty years, Hardy, I'm getting a little fed up with my job. The same damn thing, over and over again. A lot of 'em aren't bad. They follow a pattern. I can show you homicide cases this year that are almost carbon copies of jobs pulled back in 1890. The same damn pattern. There's been no pattern to this one—this whole series of killings. Hal Benton—Bill Macaulay—Mel Brennan —and now Dale Mester. A wealthy comic book publisher that didn't even live in Chicago; a private eye who lived in Chicago all his life; an alcoholic former mouthpiece for The Outfit; and now one of Clem Dorish's lesser hoods. Where in the hell is the pattern? How we going to tie them all up in the same bundle? What are we looking for? Who?"

"Bill Macaulay was killed to keep him from testifying before the Crime Committee; Mel Brennan because he was trying to peddle Mac's evidence; Dale Mester because he got smart and tried to put the bite on somebody who retaliated with a bullet and a frame."

"They all had some connection; either enemies or friends of The Outfit. They could fit in a pattern. Hal Benton doesn't. Except that his killing smelled like a gang bump-off. Where in the hell could there be a connection between a guy like Benton and guys like Brennan and Mester?"

Before I could answer that one Franklin's phone buzzed and he lifted the instrument off his desk. He listened for a moment and then said, "I'll be down right away." He returned the phone to its cradle.

He got up and gave me a grin. "The Crime Lab's got enough for what we want." I followed him to the lab.

The white-coated guy gave him a big grin and pointed to a microscope on the table. "Take a look at the slide I've got under the comparison microscope."

Franklin advanced to the table and put his eyes to the instrument. The white-coated guy stood behind him and said, "The one on the right is from Bill Macaulay's body. The one on the left is from the gun that Dale Mester had in his hand when you found him."

The detective studied the bullets under the glass for a long minute. Then he looked up at me. "You were right, Hardy. I'm no ballistics expert, but I can see that the slugs were fired from the same gun."

The white-coated technician went to a cabinet and came back with another glass slide that had two pieces of lead stuck on it with a transparent cement. He substituted it for the one Franklin had studied under the microscope. "The bullet on the right was taken from Mel Brennan's body. The other was taken from the gun Mester had in his armpit holster. They were fired from the same gun. We can prove it in court if we have to."

Franklin studied the new exhibit and then he stepped aside to let me take a peek.

The comparison microscope is a double affair—two separate microscopes—fitted with a comparison eyepiece, which, when placed on them, merge them together like one microscope. The comparison eyepiece fuses the images of two bullets or shells into one image. One may see the front half of one and the rear half of the other

bullet, and they appear to be just one bullet in the microscope.

When a bullet taken from a corpse is set in the microscope with a test bullet taken from the gun suspected as the death weapon, they can be rotated either independently or together, and any marks left on them by reason of any condition of the rifling of the barrel used, or any marks left on the primer of the shell from the breech lock or firing pin, are bound to match in the composite image of the two bullets or shells, thus making identification positive.

I studied the two slugs. I was satisfied. "O.K. Macaulay and Brennan were killed with slugs that came from guns Mester had when we found him. What's your next move?"

"Routine stuff, mostly. We redouble our efforts to find Lou Bergen. And we make a call on Clem Dorish. We'll make him produce Lou Bergen—or else. Unless Dorish himself has flown the coop."

I said, "Maybe I'm nuts, but somehow I've got the idea that Dorish doesn't know too damn much about what's been going on."

"He sent his moron to lead you to Mester's body so we'd be damn sure to find it. He must have known he was dead."

I shook my head. "Remember the pattern you talked about? I still got a hunch that Dorish doesn't fit in that pattern."

"Are you trying to say that Dorish isn't the guiding hand behind The Outfit? When this thing began you were all set to go out and buck Clem Dorish all by yourself. Now you say he doesn't fit in the pattern." He gave me a quizzical look. "You wouldn't be getting cold feet, would you?"

I said, "I'm playing a hunch. I talked to Dorish. He just doesn't act like a guy that has much to be afraid of. He acts like a guy who knows he's in the clear. He acts like a vice-president."

We walked back to Franklin's office together. He pointed out that the scrap of paper we had found in the wastebasket in Mester's room—if it was the remains of Macaulay's evidence—was still only a carbon copy and the original was still in existence and The Outfit would still be anxious to find it.

I said, "I turned the office upside down looking for it. You said you have searched Mac's rooms and you didn't find it. It wasn't stashed in his bowling ball and it wasn't in his bowling locker. I don't know where else to look."

It was past one o'clock by the electric clock on Franklin's office wall when I left headquarters. I stopped by the information desk on the ground floor and borrowed the sergeant's phone to call my own apartment. I could hear the bell ringing. I waited for a long time. All I ever heard was the intermittent ringing of the bell.

Apprehension hit me then. I had told Bertha to call the cops and then go back to my apartment. It was one o'clock in the morning and she could have conceivably dozed off on the davenport. But with the events of the night crowding her brain I doubted that explanation. I wondered if she had suffered a brainstorm and gone back to the DeLuxe. I wondered if Clem Dorish had been smart enough to foresee that we might separate and had another of his hoodlums tailing her. I had visions of blood mixed into her golden hair and her battered body tossed into an alley or the river. I had a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach.

When you don't need a taxi they're running over you. When you need one they're somewhere else or they're going in the opposite direction, loaded. I had to cut over to the cafeteria before I found a cabby picking his teeth and reading the late edition of the *Tribune*. I climbed into the back seat and gave him my address. "Make it fast and you get five."

We went through the Loop and made all the signals. We flew over the bridge, cut over to Dearborn and then sailed north to Grand. He dumped me out in front of my apartment and I tossed a five on the front seat. I ran through the gangway alongside the building and sent my eye over the cars ranged side by side in the parking lot. I couldn't find my car. That upset me, until I realized that Bertha might have parked anywhere on the street. I didn't bother to look. I ran inside and made it to the door of my apartment. There wasn't any crack of light under the door. The radio wasn't going. I hammered on the door panel with my fist. There wasn't any answer.

I took out my key and my hand was trembling so badly I couldn't find the keyhole. I unlocked the door and barged into the room. My fingers clicked the light switch on the wall as I went by.

I stopped dead. The living room was empty. I ran into the bedroom and turned on the light. It was empty, too.

The bed covers had been stripped off and were tumbled in a heap on the floor. Someone had ripped the sheets off the bed. One of them had a raveled edge. Someone had ripped a long, narrow strip off the side of it. To use as a bind or a gag. Bertha Macaulay wasn't there. The ripping of that sheet told me that she had left the apartment against her will.

I went back to the living room. My eyes traveled to the door. The bracket of the safety chain had been ripped off the inside of the door jamb and the bracket, still attached to the chain, was dangling from the door.

Only one man connected with The Outfit had ever been in my living room. That man was Elio. He was the only one who knew there was a safety chain on the door. Whoever had taken Bertha away had come prepared to cope with that safety chain. With the door opened, they had battered it with a crowbar or some other heavy instrument that had jerked the bracket out of the door jamb. Splinters of wood stuck out of the door jamb, testifying to the raw force that had been used.

I stood there for a long time. My brain seemed to be swirling in a fog. Had The Outfit caught up with her? Or had Elio, hopped up with marijuana, embarked on a program of personal revenge against me because of the battering I had given him in Dorish's office? I could picture his evil face in my mind's eye as he had stepped back from his pawing of Ella Granger. I had a feeling of utter revulsion as I visioned such an ordeal for Bertha at the hands of a sleek, slick and vicious Elio.

The phone rang. The buzzing sound made me jump with the tension. I ran across the room and jerked the instrument out of its cradle. I was praying it would be her voice. It wasn't.

The voice was scared. A man's voice, with rank fear permeating every fiber of it as it rasped over the phone. "Hardy?"

I said, "Yes."

"This is Warsaw. Jerry Warsaw." His words were tripping over each other. "Where in the hell have you been? I've been calling you every ten minutes for the last hour." He didn't wait for me to answer his question but his voice poured out, tight with fear. "Miss

Macaulay is here. At my place. She's hurt. She was slugged or something. She's dazed, rambling. I'm scared."

"How'd she get to your place?"

"She must have run into the first place that had a door. She had blood all over her face. Her lips are cut. Her clothes are torn. She keeps screaming for you. I wanted to call a doctor, but she wants you."

"What happened to her?"

"I don't know. She keeps mumbling about the De Luxe. That's one of Clem Dorish's places. I don't know what happened to her, but I'm scared, Hardy. What if they find out she's come here? They'll move in on me. I don't want any part of it."

I said, "Hell's fire! Haven't you got any backbone?" I growled into the phone. "I'll be there as soon as I can catch a cab." I hung up the phone and ran out of the apartment.

I didn't want to waste time to find my car wherever Bertha had parked it. I ran down Grand to Clark and caught a cruising cab in front of one of the neon joints there. I hopped in and gave the driver the address of the Warsaw Printing Company. Then I sat on the edge of the seat, trying to will that damn cab to go faster.

We went out Washington, turned south to Madison, and the driver slid to a stop across the street from Warsaw's place. No lights showed on the second floor.

I ran across the street and jerked open the street door that led upstairs to Warsaw's office and living quarters. There was a light in the vestibule illuminating the deep broadloom on the stairway. There was a lighted lamp on a table at the head of the stairs.

There was also a man with a gun. He stood in the vestibule. He was about forty years old. He was of stocky build—maybe a hundred and seventy-five pounds. He had a round face and his hat was pushed back off his slanting bald forehead. He had tan shoes and the holes in the tips were in a diamond pattern.

My hand slid toward my armpit. He grinned. "Don't git heroic, Bub. You j-j-just g-g-go on upstairs. Warsaw's w-w-waitin' for you."

I dropped my hand. I climbed the stairway with the knowledge that Lou Bergen was laughing at my back.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AS I CLIMBED THAT STAIRWAY my thoughts were racing. Lou Bergen's presence here and the fact that he hadn't even bothered to take my gun proved that he didn't fear me. He knew that he had plenty of reinforcements upstairs. That meant that Clem Dorish had finally come out of hiding. He had forced Jerry Warsaw to call me; to use Bertha Macaulay's safety as the magnet he knew would draw me into his web. I knew now that Clem Dorish had accepted the challenge. He was ready for the challenge. Now that it was here I had a sinking feeling in back of my knees. My mouth was dry and my tongue felt like a strange object as I tried to wet my lips. It was now one man against The Outfit and that one man was me.

I reached the head of the stairway. I blinked my eyes in the glow from the lamp at the head of the stairs. I stared around Warsaw's office.

Clem Dorish sat in Warsaw's chair behind Warsaw's desk, the desk that was as big as a pool table. It was the only chair in the room that was built to hold his enormous bulk. He leaned back in it now and his fat face smiled at me with the expression of a cat that has just wiped the remains of a canary off its whiskers. There was no smile in the cold eyes, nearly hidden in bags of flesh. There was no color in his countenance, still the color of putty.

His lips moved inside that synthetic smile and he waved his hand at the other occupants of the room. "Sort of a family reunion, Hardy. Glad you could come." Raw sarcasm was in his voice.

Jerry Warsaw, wooden with indecision, sat on the edge of the desk, his smoky eyes staring at me. He gave the impression that he was trying, without speaking, to convey the impression that my present predicament was my own fault and none of his doing; that he had acted under duress in bringing the helpless fly into the web of the fat spider.

Lou Bergen had followed me up the stairs and stood with the barrel of his gun an inch away from my back. Dorish said, "Put away

the artillery, Lou. We're all friends here. Hardy wouldn't get reckless. Would you, Hardy?"

I didn't say anything. I felt movement behind me and knew Lou Bergen was putting his gun back under his armpit. Then he stepped around me and joined the group in front of the field stone fireplace. Elio. With that bird-bright glitter in his snappy eyes and a web of adhesive tape covering his upper lip. His awful face had dark patches of bruise on cheekbones and chin where I had banged his head into Dorish's desk in the room above the De Luxe. I had no doubt that the adhesive tape concealed surgical stitches in his upper lip. He kept his mouth closed so I couldn't enjoy his missing teeth but his expression was puzzled. He wanted to hurl himself at me, but his experience ruled otherwise. That made me smile. It was the only thing I had to smile about.

Beside him stood Rosie O'Grady. She had on a dress now, instead of the naked ballet skirt and the long black stockings she wore while she peddled her caps at the De Luxe in the guise of a cigarette girl. She glanced at Elio with a smile on her face and then to the broad-shouldered man whose name I didn't know; the broad-shouldered man who had been her shadow at the De Luxe. Her voice was clear, mocking: "Mr. Hardy again. Mr. Jeff Hardy."

Everybody laughed but me. They seemed to think it was very funny.

Lou Bergen left them and went to stand behind a chair near the end of the desk. He put his hand on the back of the chair. Ella Granger was sitting in it. Her blonde hair tumbled down over her nearly naked shoulders and she had her legs crossed. Bergen was looking down the valley of her V neckline and at her legs with a hungry look on his face. She squirmed in her chair as she stared at me. Her face had no expression but her mouth was open and her white teeth were small and I got the impression of a weasel waiting to bite.

Dorish said, as if our conversation had never been interrupted, "Recklessness now, Hardy, would be reckless, wouldn't it?" His features loosened in a smile at the redundancy.

I said, "I came here for one reason, Dorish. You know that reason. I've got sense enough to know that you kidnapped Bertha Macaulay only for bargaining purposes. You think I've got something you

want. To make me give it up, you grabbed Bertha. It won't work."

"Why not?"

"I haven't got a damn thing you want."

"There is the little matter of the evidence your partner was going to give to the Crime Committee. We have the carbon copy which he was rash enough to give Miss Macaulay—rather, let us say it has been destroyed. The original is still in existence. We want it. Badly. As badly as you want Miss Macaulay. We can make a trade."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I don't have the original. If I had ever found it, I'd have turned it over to the cops long ago. It wasn't in our office. It wasn't at his home. It wasn't in his bowling locker."

Dorish raised his big body so that he was sitting upright in the chair. His eyes raked my face. Breath came out of him in a sigh. "Bowling locker? We could make a trade for the bowling ball which your partner was carrying when he met with his unfortunate—shall we say—accident?"

My voice was raw. "There's nothing in the bowling ball which Mac was carrying when he was shot down by Dale Mester and Lou Bergen. There's no evidence in the bowling ball. I can swear to that."

"You'll trade?" Dorish's tongue came out to lick his fat lips.

I laughed but there wasn't any humor in it. "I'll trade the safety of Miss Macaulay for the bowling ball, sure, but what am I trading? I don't know that she is still alive. I can be sure that I won't be turned loose on the streets of Chicago so that I can testify against you and The Outfit."

"You will trade if we assure you that Miss Macaulay is safe and will come to no harm?"

I looked around the room into unfriendly eyes. Elio, Lou Bergen, Rosie O'Grady, the broad-shouldered man, Ella Granger. Then I looked at Jerry Warsaw. A pair of smoky eyes that showed nothing. A friend, but of no use in my predicament. I was one against The Outfit.

"I can't see that I have any choice."

"If we prove to you that Miss Macaulay is unharmed, will you turn over the bowling ball to us. Now?"

I hesitated. Then I said, "Yes."

Dorish squirmed his bulk in the chair and turned his eyes to War-

saw. The latter's face was turned away from me. Dorish looked back in my direction and then waved his fat hand at Lou Bergen. "Get her."

Bergen left the chair behind Ella Granger and walked in front of me with a leer on his face and vanished through a doorway into the rear of the building, where Warsaw had his living quarters. I stood still, watching the doorway.

The door opened and Lou Bergen came out. Behind him was Bertha Macaulay. There was no blood on her face. There was no blood matted in that golden-brown hair. Her eyes went big and round when she saw me. She tried to speak but the white cloth knotted around her mouth killed the sound. She came across the carpet, her body a thing of beauty in my eyes. She ran into my arms and her head buried itself on my chest. I patted her and uttered words I can't remember. Her body was trembling under my touch. She lifted her head and I saw her love shining openly in her eyes. I kissed her cheek; her eyes. I held her close.

Dorish said, sarcastically, "A touching scene. But we are delaying our real business. You see that Miss Macaualy has not been harmed. Except for enduring part of one of your bedsheets in her mouth. We do not like screaming women. It was a precaution we had to take. I regret the lurid description of her fate Mr. Warsaw was forced to give you over the telephone. Now shall we get down to business?"

"Release her now," I said, "and I'll get the bowling ball."

He leaned back in the chair and his huge body spilled out over its arms. He was in a mellow mood because he knew he held all the cards in the game. "We couldn't do that," he said. "We couldn't take the risk of having either of you talk. Both of you will be held for—say, one week—in protective custody. Then you will be released. By then most of us will be in other climes. There is a beautiful island off the coast of Peru where we may live in luxury for the rest of our lives, or until we wish to return here. When our work has had time to—shall we say—blow over and be forgotten?"

"I don't have much choice, do I?"

He leaned forward again. This time he pointed his fat hand at Lou Bergen. "Take Miss Macaulay back. Then you and Elio will escort Mr. Hardy to wherever he has hidden the bowling ball. You will get it and bring it here."

Bergen took Miss Macaulay away from me and led her into the living quarters behind the office. He returned and stood beside me. He gave Dorish a flat grin. "He's packing a gun."

Dorish's fat face performed a deprecating grimace. "Such recklessness, Mr. Hardy. You always tempt us to get tough." He moved his hand. "Remove it, Lou. It had best be left here. We wouldn't want him to try heroics."

Bergen's hand dove under my coat and came out with my gun. He put it back on the desk in front of Dorish. The latter looked at it with repugnance.

Then he glanced at Elio. He chuckled deep down in his fat belly and then his face was grim. "You will stifle any motive for revenge for the loss of your teeth, Elio. I want Hardy back here promptly. With the bowling ball. Understand?"

Elio didn't speak. He glared at Dorish and then he glared at me. He walked across the room and stood at the head of the stairway. He waited until Bergen took my arm and led me to the stairway. Elio went down the stairs ahead of me and Bergen brought up the rear.

We went out on the sidewalk and Bergen unlocked the door of a black sedan parked at the curb. Elio was standing behind me. I had no chance to make a break.

Bergen turned around and gave Elio a tight grin. "You better drive." The latter slid into the front seat and got behind the wheel. Bergen opened the back door and turned to face me. "You get in front with Elio, Hardy. And don't try any funny business."

I got into the front seat and closed the door. Bergen closed the back door and sat forward on the edge of the seat, his gun in his hand. "Don't get heroic now, Bub. I won't shoot you. We still haven't caught up with that bowling ball and if I shot you we never would. But if you make one funny move I'll slap you silly with this gun butt. Got that straight?"

I didn't say anything.

Elio said, "Where do we go from here, tough guy?"

I said, "My office."

"Don't give us the run-around. The boys went through the joint with a fine-tooth comb. The bowling ball ain't there."

"It's there. You just didn't look in the right place."

Elio put the car in gear and we pulled out into the street. We drove down Madison. There wasn't any traffic now and we had clear sailing. When we hit Canal the bridge was going up by the Daily News Building so Elio turned south and we went over to Jackson Boulevard before he turned east again. The boat had passed and the bridge was down. We went east to Dearborn and Elio turned north and we parked across the street from my office building.

Bergen got out first and stood on the sidewalk. He had his hand under the left side of his double-breasted. He stood there until Elio and I got out. Then he led the way across the street. I followed him and Elio trailed me.

The counter man in the cafeteria was gaping and the one customer was a drunk who was asleep on his arms at a front table. Bergen pushed open the lobby door and went in. I followed him. Elio stayed just far enough behind me so I couldn't bolt. That didn't bother me. I had my reckless plan worked out in my brain. When we went up the steps I'd kick backwards. Maybe I'd be lucky and catch Elio in the face with my foot. At the same time I could dive forward and hit Bergen behind the knees. If that worked I'd take my chances.

That plan evaporated when we reached the stairway. Bergen said, "Hold it, Hardy." Then he turned around and started to back up the stairs, one hand on the side railing and the other hand holding his gun. When he had climbed a few steps he said, "Come on. Don't try anything or I'll crack your skull."

I followed him up the steps. Elio lagged far behind until we reached the top of the stairway. He lagged far behind as Bergen led the way down the hall to my office. They stood on each side of me as I unlocked the door. Then Bergen went in and turned on the light in the outer office. I followed him in. Elio came in and closed the door.

Bergen said, "Where is it?"

"In the private office," I said.

"Let's go." He gave me a prod with the gun.

We went into the private office. I flicked the switch for the light. I reached for the fan switch but Bergen hit my arm. "The bowling ball, Bub. That's all we want."

Elio was surveying *Miss July* as if he were contemplating her possibilities as a bed partner. I went over and took the paper clips off the bottom of the calendar. "Go ahead and paw her awhile. Make like it's Ella Granger."

He came for me, his eyes glittering. Bergen walked between us. He snarled at Elio. "You heard what Dorish said. All we want is the bowling ball."

"I'll cut his guts out!"

Bergen laughed. "Why didn't you do it when you had the chance? When he was working over that ugly mug of yours."

Elio could have committed a double murder then, and he'd have enjoyed it. But to a hood, orders are orders, so he just cursed.

I took advantage of the by-play. I stuck my finger in the O on the telephone and twisted it to the right as far as it would go at the same time I shoved it off the top of the desk. The clatter sounded like dropping a hunk of concrete in the silence.

Both men pulled up beside, murder in their eyes.

Bergen said, "Don't get cute. That's a dial phone. Pick it up and put it back on the desk. The operator won't hear us and tip off the cops."

I bent down and picked up the phone. I took my time putting the receiver back in the cradle. I didn't hear the operator's voice.

Bergen made a motion with his gun. "The bowling ball, Bub."

I grinned as I went to the icebox and lifted up the drain board and pulled Mac's bowling bag from its hiding place beside the drip pan.

Bergen said, "Well, I'll be damned! The boys went over this place and never looked in the most obvious spot."

When Bergen said "obvious" something clicked in my brain. It was a matter of association inside my gray cells. I wondered why I hadn't seen the obvious before now. The secret of the bowling ball, the whereabouts of Macaulay's evidence were an open book to me now.

Bergen took the bowling bag away from me and started for the door. I followed him, and I gave *Miss July* a big wink as I passed her by. I flicked off the light switch by the door and at the same time flicked on the switch that controlled the electric fan. *Miss July*

would get very uncomfortable during the long night in my stuffy office. I might as well let the cooling breezes blow over her epidermis.

'I was happy as hell when I walked downstairs with Bergen and Elio. Because I had found in my brain the pattern of three murders and the pattern that was going to blow The Outfit to hell. All I had to do was gain my freedom long enough to prove it. That was all I had to do.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WE WENT WEST on Madison like it was a boulevard. Elio kept the car in the street car tracks and we rode as if we were on asphalt. By the time we reached our destination the De Luxe neons had been turned out and there weren't more than half a dozen people on the streets. Those were derelicts and drunks. Elio parked the car on the wrong side of the street and got out and circled the car. After I got out Lou Bergen opened the back door and stepped out of the back seat with the bowling bag. He had his gun in his right hand and he made sure I saw it.

"What I said before still goes. Don't try any monkey business."

I shrugged. I wasn't paying too much attention to Elio and Lou Bergen. They were only minor pieces in the jig-saw puzzle I had to put together in my brain. A jig-saw I had to rearrange quickly if I wanted to leave Warsaw's office alive and bring Bertha Macaulay with me.

We went up the steps to Warsaw's office. The unholy personnel there had not changed. Clem Dorish still had his huge bulk parked in the chair behind Warsaw's desk and the latter still sat on the edge of it. The others looked tired and bored. Ella Granger, Rosie O'Grady, the broad-shouldered man knew nothing of the undercurrents that would explode into violence within the next few minutes. They eyed me with venom in their glances. I felt a raw humor toward them. They were only ignorant; as ignorant as I had been until a few minutes before.

Clem Dorish put away the gold knife he had been using on his fingernails. He rocked his body forward in the chair and put his arms on the desk top. His eyes went into hiding in their bags of flesh as he stared at Lou Bergen and the burden he carried.

He swept aside a heavy metal fountain pen base and a heavy ash tray. "Put the bowling ball here, Bergen," he said.

Bergen walked past me and put the bowling bag on the desk top

in front of Dorish. He stood there in front of me, as if trying to guard it from my sight. Elio came forward and stood at the end of the desk, next to Warsaw.

Dorish's fat hand caressed the bag like it was made of gold. His fingers fumbled with the zipper. Bergen leaned across the desk and tugged it loose to expose the black shape of the bowling ball. Dorish slapped Bergen's hand aside viciously. "I can handle it."

He leaned forward and lifted the bowling ball out of the bag and put it on the desk in front of him, pushing the bag away as if it were unwanted rubbish.

He put two fat fingers in the finger holes and pushed down on them. A queer expression crossed his features. He looked up at me.

"The damn thing won't work," he said. "If you've tried to double-cross me . . ."

Bergen said, quickly, "There wasn't no double-cross. Hardy never had a chance to do anything."

It was then I sprang my surprise. "Why don't you let Warsaw try?" I said. "He knows more about such things. He knows more about hiding heroin in trick bowling balls than anybody else. Let him try. He'll make it work."

Suddenly the air in that room smelled like ozone after an electrical storm. Seven pairs of eyes stared at me. The tension was so tight you could cut it with a knife.

I grinned at Jerry Warsaw. He still had that wooden, half-scared expression on his features. He stared at me. He wasn't smiling. His lips moved stiffly and his words were soft. "If you're trying to be funny, Hardy, I don't appreciate . . ."

"Not funny," I said. "I'm two steps from the graveyard and I know it. You had a lot of people in Chicago fooled, Warsaw. Including me. But as Abe Lincoln put it, you can't fool all of the people all of the time."

Bergen said, "He quotes L-l-lincoln, yet."

Warsaw took his rump off the desk. "Keep on talking, Hardy. Make yourself clear. Spill your guts."

"Okay. You've had everybody in Chicago thinking you were a self-made man. Printing comic books by the millions. It was only a front. Your real job is running The Outfit. Dorish is nothing but a

jerk who fronted for you while you pulled the strings. You're the master mind! You're the one responsible for Macaulay's murder. You killed Mel Brennan. You killed Dale Mester!"

Dorish blinked his eyes and stared at Warsaw. A thin smile pulled up the corners of the latter's mouth. Dorish said, "Mr. Hardy likes to talk. He'll talk himself on to a slab."

Warsaw's smile faded and the smoky eyes looked at me. "You've embarrassed me with loose talk, Hardy. Anything to substantiate your ravings?"

"I know your pitch," I said. "You're the big shot of The Outfit. You know all about vice and corruption in Chicago because you're behind it. Especially about narcotics, because that's where the quick money is. You're the guy that expanded the market by having your peddlers give free samples to kids on get them on the needle. The murders were all committed to protect your filthy racket. Dope."

Dorish said, "He's just talking because he likes it."

Warsaw said, "Shut up!" Then he looked at me. I wondered why I had ever been fooled into thinking that he was scared of anything in the world. His smoky eyes were darkening and his features were drawn and tight and pulled his lips away from his teeth. He gave the impression that his bite was deadly and that a mere touch of his body would sear your fingers.

He said, "Go on, Hardy. I'd like to hear this pitch of yours."

"It was simple. So damn simple it fooled everybody. So obvious we couldn't see the forest on account of the trees. A half million dollars worth of heroin—retail value—was brought into Chicago. Concealed in a trick bowling ball. Brought in by an international smuggler. To turn over to you. For maybe a hundred grand in cash. You didn't have a hundred grand in cash so he had to stash it some place until you raked up that much cash. He picked a bowling locker at the *Bowl* as the best place to cache the stuff. Thursday you let him know you had the money raised. So he turned over to you the key to the bowling locker. All you had to do was take the key to the *Bowl* and get the bowling ball full of heroin. But, in the meantime, Bill Macaulay had tumbled to the scheme and he went to the *Bowl* and got the stuff. You had sent Dale Mester and Lou Bergen with the key. They found the stuff gone—and they also saw

Bill Macaulay walking out of the joint with a bowling bag. They followed him up the street and killed him. They didn't get the bowling bag because my gun and I happened to show up and they came back to you empty-handed. The international smuggler had your hundred grand so you cooped him up until such a time that you got the heroin or you'd take your money back."

Warsaw said, "You'd make a good writer for comic book scripts, but you just don't know the facts."

Dorish's fat face was the color of liver. "You got no proof of anything, Mr. Hardy."

Warsaw gave me that tight smile again and I felt the flesh crawl on the back of my neck. "Your true crime script lacks documentation."

"Yeah? The newspapers jumped on Mac's killing as an attempt of The Outfit to keep Mac from testifying before the Crime Committee. We knew Mac had left written evidence behind but we couldn't find it. The cops couldn't find it. But Mel Brennan found the carpon copy Mac had given to his daughter. Brennan was silly enough to try to sell it to you. You rigged it up like you were scared to death and dragged me into it because you wanted to use *me* as an alibi."

"Just like Dick Tracy." He sneered at me. "You goddam fool, you were with me when we found Brennan's body. How in the hell can you hang that on me?"

"It's like I said before. I overlooked the obvious. I couldn't see the forest on account of the trees. You drove down to the Union Station with Brennan in his coupe. You parked on Adams Street. You rolled up the windows and shot him. You got the carbon copy of Mac's evidence he had stolen from Bertha Macaulay's room. You got out of the car and walked around the corner and down Canal Street. You were carrying the gun and the carbon copy of Mac's evidence folded up inside a copy of the *Madison Booster*. You dropped the gun and the carbon copy in the rubbish container but kept the *Madison Booster*. You met me in the station and then we went back and retraced your route. You stopped at the trash barrel and tossed the *Madison Booster* into it. You did this, not to get rid of the paper, but to check and see if Dale Mester had obeyed

orders and taken the gun and the evidence out of the rubbish barrel."

Warsaw stared at me. "Now Dale Mester comes in to it. How are you going to prove he was within fifty miles of that spot?"

"That's easy. My car was parked on Canal Street and Miss Macaulay was in it. She saw him."

"So she saw him. But how are you going to tag me with Brennan's killing?"

"We overlooked the obvious. Your play-acting had us stymied for a while but the obvious thing came out on top. You had agreed to meet me at the newsstand at the bottom of the Adams Street ramp in the Union Station. Yet, in spite of the fact that you had parked on Adams Street, within fifty feet of the entrance to the ramp, you chose to walk down to Canal and enter the station by that door. You did that in order to dump the gun and the evidence in the trash barrel for Dale Mester to pick up. When we went to meet Brennan you again went out the Canal Street door. Only because you wanted to dump the *Madison Booster* into the trash barrel and be sure that Dale Mester had removed the gun and the carbon copy of the evidence. It's just a simple matter of geography. A straight line is the shortest distance between two points."

He didn't say anything. Dorish didn't say anything. So I went on. I was trying to kill time. I knew that unless I dragged my story out time wasn't the only thing that was going to be killed. I would wind up in the river and maybe this time a diver wouldn't find me.

I said, "Then we come to Dale Mester. The former 'baby bandit'. He was a tough guy. He liked guns. He thought everybody was afraid of guns, including you. But he wasn't very bright. He got the idea that because he had the gun you'd used to kill Brennan and the carbon copy of Mac's evidence, that you'd be ripe for a little shake-down. So when you went to the rendezvous on South Halsted to meet him later and get the gun and the evidence he put the bite on you. That was a fatal mistake—for him. You killed him. You burned up the carbon copy in the wastebasket and you left both guns behind. His gun and the one you'd used to kill Brennan. You knew the cops would study the slugs out of those guns and find that one had been used to kill Mac and the other had been used to kill

Brennan. You figured the cops would figure Mester was the killer they wanted and wipe the case off the books. But the cops didn't figure it that way. They didn't swallow the idea that Mester would bump himself off just because he had his picture in the paper and the cops were looking for him for two killings. Guys like Mester aren't afraid of guns or of cops."

"Proof?"

"I can produce it when the time comes. But to finish up with Mester. He was dead but nobody had found his body and he wasn't being a sucker until his body was found so the cops could hang everything on him. That's when I still thought Dorish was the brain instead of a grease-butt front for you. When I went to the Kenwood Kennels he detained me only long enough to let Lou Bergen get out of the house and then he sent his moron stooge to lead me to Mester's body. I found it and you figured the whole case was wiped clean and you were in the clear. But you weren't. You still didn't have the bowling ball and you still didn't have Mac's evidence. The loss of one would cost you a hundred grand and the failure to get Mac's evidence would put you in the pen for the rest of your life."

"That won't happen, Hardy. Because you and Miss Macaulay will suddenly become conspicuous by your absence. It may cause a furore at first but it will die down. Such things always do."

"Killing me won't save your hundred grand. Killing me won't get Mac's evidence."

"We got no proof Macaulay ever had any evidence that would hurt *me*. Maybe Dorish, but not me." He sent Dorish a cold glance and then his smoky eyes returned to me. "He is expendable. So are you. And Miss Macaulay."

Dorish said, "Hell, I like that." He looked at Warsaw with the expression of a bilious pouter pigeon. "Expendable, am I?"

Warsaw said, "Shut up!"

Dorish shut up.

Warsaw turned around to face the desk. He put his hand out and dragged the ball across the desk toward him, scooting the blotter pad off on the floor as he did so.

He growled at Dorish. "Your fingers are too damn fat to fit in the finger holes. You have to push both fingers all the way down."

Dorish leaned forward to watch Warsaw put his fingers in the bowling ball. Warsaw's fingers were lean and bony and they reached all the way down into the finger holes. He had an expression of wonder on his face as he pushed downward. I don't know what he expected to happen. Nothing did.

He stared at me. Then he sent a hot glance up at Lou Bergen, who was still standing at the desk, his chunky shoulder blocking my view. "You sure Hardy didn't pull a switch on you? This damn thing don't work right."

Bergen said, "He didn't pull no switch. He pulled the bag out from under the ice box where he had it cached. He never even touched it after that. I took over."

Elio put in his two cents' worth. He couldn't talk very plainly on account of the adhesive tape on his upper lip and his missing teeth but he got his words out. "He never pulled no switch."

I mocked his language. "I never pulled no switch. That's the bowling bag and the bowling ball Bill Macaulay was carrying when he was shot down by Mester and Bergen." I waited for that to sink in and then I said, "But there's a way to make it work."

"Goddam you! How?"

I gave him a grin. I wasn't in a humorous mood, but there was a funny aspect. Warsaw was in the spot of trying to find a hundred grand worth of dope, knowing where to look, and still being stymied. I said, "Why don't you call in the guy in the back room? He's the guy that put it there. He ought to be able to get it out for you."

"What are you talking about?"

"Bring in the international smuggler. He's been hiding out in your living quarters since Sunday night. He brought the dope to Chicago in a bowling ball. He's got your hundred grand. Make him deliver the dope."

Warsaw's eyes looked like those of a snake, with the lids almost vanished; the whites glaring in nakedness around the smoky pupils.

My story hadn't taken up enough time. But I didn't know how to stall any longer. "Why don't you bring out the dead man?" I asked. "He knows the secret."

"The dead man?"

"Yeah," I said. "Bring out Hal Benton."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE DOOR BEHIND THE DESK opened and Hal Benton came in.

He was wearing a soft white suit that draped his broad shoulders and looked well on his proud frame. But his dark eyes were pools of venomous hate directed at me.

He said, "I'm sorry, Jeff, that you had to stick your nose in. You were my friend. Now you are my enemy. I will fight to protect what I've earned. I'm not going to let friendship for you make me soft."

My mouth showed my contempt. "For a man who fought for his country in mud and filth on foreign soil, you've sunk low. You're a partner of mud and filth, peddling dope that finds it way to school kids." I spat at his immaculate suit.

He ignored me and gent his attention to the bowling ball on the desk. He said to Warsaw, "You dumb cluck. All you have to do is push down with both fingers in the finger holes. The pressure will release a metal plunger in the thumb hole and that plunger will spring out. Then all you have to do is pour the heroin out."

Warsaw stared at him. "Do it."

Benton put his long fingers in the finger holes and pushed. Nothing happened. He took his fingers out and whirled the bowling ball around on the desk and read the serial number. He glared up at Warsaw. "You goddam fool! You've been double-crossed! This isn't the right ball."

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Bertha Macaulay come out of the door. She had taken off the gag. She came over to stand behind me and I felt her hand on my arm. I growled at Benton.

"You've been double-crossed before. You were paying the bills for an apartment on North Clark. For Ella Granger. A blonde you picked up in a bistro and installed as your Chicago mistress. You don't know that one of Warsaw's hoods was fooling around with her and you don't know that she enjoyed the pawing of Elio. You've been a sap."

The reaction was more than I hoped for. The metamorphosis of Benton from man to monster took place before I could finish my words. His face flamed with anger and his eyes were points of blazing wrath. He strode across the room. He stopped in front of Ella Granger. He jerked her to her feet and his right hand swept across her face in a slap that rocked her back on her heels. Before she could utter a sound his right hand reached out. He grabbed her dress at the V of her neckline and ripped it downward with one swoop of his hand. The thin cloth came away in his hand. Like a maniac he stripped her dress from her body. He ripped away the rest of her things as she stood there, her screams of fright bouncing off the walls.

He stopped, his breath coming out of him in wheezes. He stared at Lou Bergen, an ugly smile on his face. "Take her down to the street and turn her loose. If she's a streetwalker, let's put her back where she belongs."

Bergen's body tensed in front of me and his right arm bent, as if ready to reach for the gun under his left armpit. He said, his voice tight, "Without clothes?"

"Yes. What are clothes to a tramp?"

Bergen hesitated. Then he said, "Go to hell! I don't work for you. Warsaw's my boss." His hand had reached for his gun.

I said, softly, "Hold it, Bergen. There's no use killing him. The cops will take care of that."

Benton had lost some of his maniacal drive. His dark eyes had faded from their angry fervor. His ugly smile was on me. "The cops? You'll never live to see cops again, Jeff."

"They'll fry your fanny in the hot seat. Not for running a dope racket. For murder."

He stopped dead still. "Murder? You don't know what you're talking about."

"I think I do. You won't get away with your scheme. The corpse they found in the river. It had all your personal belongings in the clothes. Your secretary said the dental work matched yours. It was bloated and disfigured and they had to take the word of men who knew you. But I know who the corpse was. It was the body of the man you killed because he caught you red-handed with a bowling ball full of dope. It was the body of Bob Murtaugh!"

There were two spits of flame in the room. They came from the muzzle of a tiny .22 caliber automatic in the hand of Rosie O'Grady. She stood there, pumping lead into the body of Hal Benton. One slug hit him high in the shoulder and the impact made him waver. He moved his arm toward his armpit.

I chose that moment to make my break. My hand swept the heavy metal fountain pen base off the desk and slammed it down on the base of Lou Bergen's skull. He sensed the motion and whirled. He threw my aim off enough so that I struck him a glancing blow. He wavered but did not go down. He started to turn.

Clem Dorish, behind the desk, was reaching for his gun. I saw Bertha Macaulay come out of nowhere. She was swinging the metal ash tray. It bounced off Dorish's fat head and rattled on the desk top. Dorish swayed sideways. Blood seeped down the side of his head. His eyes were glazed.

I moved just in time. Benton's hand had come out. It was holding a gun. The muzzle was pointed at my belly and his finger was tightening on the trigger. The hole in the barrel was an abyss waiting for my body. I twisted sideways and hit Lou Bergen with my shoulder. His body fell across mine and Benton's slug hit him in the guts. I reached out and held Bergen's body in front of me. I could feel the thudding impact of Benton's bullets.

I could hold him no longer. I let his body fall to the floor. And Hal Benton, his eyes red-rimmed, gleamed with hate as he leveled his gun at me.

The broad-shouldered man came across the room like a catapult. His shoulders hit Benton at the side of the knees and knocked him over like a ten-pin. Warsaw was diving for Benton's gun as it kicked out of his hand. I leaped forward and ground my heel into his wrist. He howled with the pain as my heel ground his flesh. I leaned over and picked it up. I backed away from Warsaw so that I could get everybody in the room within my range. "I counted the shots Benton used. There's a couple left. Who wants them?"

Warsaw backed away, a nervous tic suddenly bothering his mouth corners. Elio had a knife in his hand. He swallowed hard and dropped the knife on the carpet. It didn't make any noise. Clem Dorish was just coming out of his daze behind the desk. His face looked like putty again. He had no fight left in him. Not even talk.

Rosie O'Grady was still holding the baby automatic and staring at the fallen body of Hal Benton, as if wondering what she had done and how she had done it with such a little piece of artillery.

The broad-shouldered man was getting up off the floor. He had his own gun in his hand but the barrel was pointed at the floor, not at me. He gave me a grin and made a circle with his thumb and forefinger. "What do we do now?"

I said, "I don't know who you are, friend, but thanks. Benton's bullet would have found my belly if you hadn't hit him when you did."

"My name's Shelby," he said, "Federal Narcotics. The thanks go to you. You've given us the answer to some questions we've been asking for a long time. How heroin got into Chicago. I've been working my way up inside the gang but I wasn't even getting near to first base."

I moved my gun toward Rosie O'Grady. "Why did she use Benton for target practice? A dope peddler?"

"Only by proxy, friend. And only to help us. Bob Murtaugh was her fiancee. They were to be married on Labor Day. Lieutenant Haley would have told you some of this stuff, but we like to keep it in the Bureau. No leaks."

I sensed movement to one side. I whirled but I was too late. A chair came hurtling into me. It smashed my extended gun back against the body and the weapon curled out of my fingers and dropped to the floor. Jerry Warsaw, his smoky eyes aflame with insanity, swarmed in on me like a scratching feline. His fingernails sought my eyes.

I ducked my head and his raking nails dug into the cloth of my clothes and made a sound like a kid scratching on a screen door. I brought my knee up. It missed his groin. He poked his left hand toward my face, his fist doubled. I sidestepped. And his right hand came out of nowhere and landed flush on my jaw.

I reeled. The guy knew what to do with his hands. He was no novice. I shook my head to get the cobwebs out. I faintly heard Shelby shouting, "Hold it, Warsaw, or I'll brain you!" He had his gun leveled.

I sucked great gulps of air into my lungs. I wasn't wobbly any more. "I can handle it," I screamed. "For Mac."

I crouched low and moved in on Warsaw. Flecks of odd color danced in those smoky eyes. He was berserk. He wanted to wreak vengeance on me. I was the one who had brought his criminal house of cards tumbling down about his ears.

But I was a little berserk, too. This was the man who had pulled the strings to bring about the death of my partner. This was the head of criminal infamy in Chicago.

He came in again, weaving, side-stepping. He lashed out with his left hand. I side-stepped. His right came up. I fooled him. I jumped toward him. His blow caught me high on the chest. I felt like my lungs were caving in. But I sank my left hand wrist-deep in his belly. I heard the air swoosh out of him. His mouth popped open, gasping to get air in his lungs. It was then my right hand came up from the floor and hit him on the point of his jaw. He staggered back on his heels. He didn't have a glass jaw. He didn't drop. He wobbled backward, his body swaying in front of me. He kept ducking his head from side to side. He was fighting for time to get his senses back.

I lashed out again. He whirled around sideways and slipped away from the blow. He couldn't retreat any farther. His back was against the wall. He kicked at me. His shoe dug deep into my leg. I screamed with the pain. Then I swarmed in on him, both fists pumping.

My left hand crashed into his belly. He dropped his hands down. My right hand hit him on the side of the jaw. His read rapped into the plaster and a rash of blood stained his cheek where it raked the roughness. I hit him again and again and again. I was punching a bag. A human punching bag. My anger drove me. I kept punching and punching. Every blow found its mark. A haze was coming over those smoky eyes of his. The flare of insanity had fled. He was whimpering. Moaning. He wheeled sideways desperately. I hit him again. His face slammed into the plaster. He bounced back. Spittle and blood were draining out of his mouth corners. I hit him again. His face went slamming into the plaster. This time he was done. The starch went out of him. His body slumped slowly down the wall and he curled up on the floor, crying like a baby.

I stepped back, my lungs straining for air. I looked down at him and I had pride in my voice as I looked at Shelby, standing ready with his gun. "That's the end of The Outfit, I guess."

Suddenly I was aware of a great noise downstairs. Somebody

crashed in the downstairs door and feet were running up the steps.

I whirled to the stairway. Lieutenant Ben Franklin was there, his police special in his hand. Behind him trooped half a dozen plain-clothesmen. One of them held a tear gas gun. Another had a submachine gun cradled in his beefy arms, and an expression on his face that showed his disappointment at lack of an opportunity to use it.

Franklin came into the middle of the room and looked around. Hal Benton and Lou Bergen on the floor. Clem Dorish behind the desk. Warsaw trying to regain his feet, blood spilling from his mouth. Elio looking sick and puzzled. Rosie O'Grady and her baby automatic. Shelby of the Feds. And the naked, whimpering body of Ella Granger, who was too scared to cover up her charms. Bertha Macaulay dashed into Warsaw's living room and came back with a coat to cover her from the stares of the cops. Then sat her down on a chair and stood in front of her, trying to coax her back to rationality.

Franklin gave me a slow smile. "All right, Hardy. You beat the cops to it."

I said, "You were damned slow getting here. I thought the telephone operator would tip you off. I dialed O and knocked the phone off the desk in my office when they made me go after the bowling ball. I thought she'd hear enough to have you coming here pronto."

Franklin said, smiling. "We didn't have to depend on the operator, Hardy. The cops aren't always dumb. We've had your telephone tapped for the past twenty-four hours. One of our men heard every word you said in the office. Nobody mentioned Warsaw. All we could do was try to get to the office before they got away. We didn't get there in time."

One of his men obeyed his signal and brought a rolled-up sheaf of paper to Franklin. Franklin unrolled it to display the seductive figure of *Miss July* on our office calendar. "You left your office fan running—on purpose, I think—and when we opened the office *Miss July* was standing out from the wall in the breeze. We noticed something black on the backs of the leaves. When we looked we found the original of Macaulay's evidence against The Outfit, in his own handwriting on the back of the last six sheets of the calendar." He gave me a quizzical look. "Did you know about it all the time?"

"No. The idea hit me all of a sudden tonight when Bergen and Elio took me to the office. I got to thinking about *Miss July* and the paper clips and I began to wonder why Mac would object to a calendar blowing in the breeze of the fan. The answer was that the paper clips were put on to keep the leaves of the calendar from blowing and showing that something was written on their backs. I didn't have the opportunity to investigate so when I left the office I turned the fan on, hoping that somebody would tumble to it. It was so simple and yet so damned obvious that nobody tumbled to it. Just like The Outfit failed to look under the icebox for the bowling ball."

Franklin said, "We didn't have time to read all of Macaulay's evidence. But we read enough to know that we can put a state representative in jail for taking commissions on the sale of millions of envelopes to the state. We can make it interesting for a couple police officials who have safety-deposit boodle far too big for the salaries they have been paid. We have evidence on several big shot politicians and ward heelers tied up with The Outfit in the protection racket. We've also got the names of Number One pushers and peddlers in the dope ring." He glanced aside at Rosie O'Grady. "Most of that was ferreted out by Bob Murtaugh, working for the Narcotics Bureau." Then his voice rose in pride. "Most important of all, Macaulay left definite proof that Jerome Warsaw and not Clem Dorish was the head of The Outfit."

He glared at Warsaw.

Warsaw had managed to climb to his feet by supporting himself against the wall. He wavered on his feet and his eyes wavered like a hunted animal's. Blood marred the flesh of his chin and the nervous tic was making the muscles jump around his mouth corners. He spat out his words. "You're bluffing. You can't prove anything. All you've got is the brain storm of a private eye. You can't prove anything."

Franklin gave him a scornful look. "We'll prove it, Warsaw. We can throw the book at you. Kidnapping is good enough to start on. Your goons snatched Miss Macaulay from Hardy's apartment and brought her here and kept her under duress. You made the call that brought Hardy here. That ties you up tight. If that doesn't work we've still got a pretty good case against you for the murder of Mel

Brennan and Dale Mester. We can prove that Benton killed Bob Murtaugh and that he brought half a million dollars' worth of heroin into Chicago."

He gave me a grin. "Macaulay did a thorough job. He took the trouble of looking up the registry on the *Osiris*. The boat belonged to Benton, not to Warsaw. Benton, the rich comic book publisher, used it to travel up and down the coast of America delivering dope to many local crime kings like Warsaw. Macaulay also found out that although Warsaw reputedly printed millions of comic books in his plant here there was no record of Warsaw ever having received a shipment of *colored inks*."

He went on, "Elio we can give at least twenty-five years under the provisions of the new law enacted by the legislature at the last session. Through Miss O'Grady, who was helping Bob Murtaugh until the time of his death, we've got a sure case against him." I grinned as he threw in a little white lie. "As for Lou Bergen, we have at the Crime Lab a little gadget known as a comparison microscope. We can prove that one of the bullets which killed Macaulay was fired from his gun. Clem Dorish." He paused and gave a little sneer at the soft, fat man. "We didn't ever get any proof on Dorish because he was a front for Warsaw. He didn't know anything. Just a dumb, fat man. But now we can throw the book at him in connection with the death of Dale Mester. Ella Granger. We can give her a tough time; if nothing else works we can try the old familiar one of adultery."

He turned to Bertha Macaulay. "You can be proud of your dad, Miss. He did a remarkable job for the people of this city and of this state. He was one whale of a cop."

Her eyes misted and she thanked him.

Then Franklin turned to Rosie O'Grady. "You did a wonderful job. If The Outfit had ever found out that you were working for the Narcotics Bureau your life wouldn't have been worth a nickel. The people owe a big debt to Bob Murtaugh."

The Federal Narcotics man came over to me. "The thing I'm interested in is the heroin that Benton smuggled in. Where is it?"

I grinned. "Macaulay was 'way ahead of us on that one, too. The bowling ball is safe, I think. With a half million dollars' worth of heroin. It's locked up in Mac's bowling locker at the *Bowl*."

Shelby said, "The Bureau isn't satisfied with knowing that it's at the *Bowl*. We want to be sure it's out of circulation."

Franklin said, tiredly, "Shelby, it's four o'clock on Sunday morning."

Shelby said, stubbornly, "We want that dope. Now."

Franklin gave some orders to his aides. The once proud members of The Outfit were gathered up and herded down the stairway under heavy guard. I got a lot of satisfaction out of the fact that Hal Benton and Jerry Warsaw needed help. Warsaw's wounds were superfluous and the bullets in Benton from Miss O'Grady's baby automatic had not hit vital spots. Both would live to stand trial and both would live long enough to sit down in the electric chair.

When Warsaw's office was clear and the sirens of the police car had faded away down Madison Street, Franklin used the telephone. He ordered a squad of uniformed cops to descend on the *Bowl* and guard it, front and back, until our arrival. He ordered other men to hunt up and rout out of bed the owner of the *Bowl* so the latter could come down and open the joint.

Shelby insisted on calling Lieutenant Haley of the Chicago Narcotics Bureau so the latter could be in on the kill.

With these details out of the way, Franklin, Shelby, Rosie O'Grady, Bertha Macaulay and I rode in a police car to the *Bowl*.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHEN WE REACHED the *Bowl* two uniformed cops were on guard at the front door. The owner of the place hadn't shown up yet. He lived on the far North Side and a police squad car was bringing him downtown. He finally arrived and admitted us to the bowling alley. He turned on all the lights and we went into the bowling locker room. I unlocked 203 and got the bowling ball out of Macaulay's locker and carried it out on the runway of an alley where the light was good.

I put the ball on the floor with the finger holes up. I stuck two fingers in the finger holes and pushed down hard.

There was a little click and a piece of metal something like the valve and valve stem in an auto engine popped up out of the thumb hole. I tipped the ball sideways slightly and a little white powder that looked like very fine granulated sugar came out of the hole.

Shelby smelled it and tasted it. "We've hit the jackpot."

He stuck out his hand to me. "The Federal Bureau of Narcotics thanks you."

Lieutenant Haley came in then and he was hanging around the edges. "The Chicago Narcotics Bureau thanks you, too. You and Macaulay and Miss O'Grady. This is wonderful. The best news I've ever had in fifteen years in the Bureau."

Shelby told Franklin, "No publicity on the dope angle or the arrest of The Outfit, please. There may be some pushers and peddlers we can nab if we keep this under wraps for a few hours."

Franklin was agreable. "All right." Then he grinned at me and his face wasn't as tired as usual. "Hardy, I know you've had a busy day but I'd appreciate it if you'd come down to headquarters and tell your story. From the beginning."

I said, "Lieutenant, can't that wait? Mac's funeral is at two o'clock this afternoon. I'd like to get some sleep."

"Sure, it can wait. But if you tell your story now we may gather up some loose ends. We may dissuade some big shots from taking

sudden vacations in Europe and South America if we can work fast enough. You can tell your story to a tape recorder. We can transcribe it and you can sign it later."

I looked at Bertha. She nodded and I said, "Okay."

We went down to the Central Station on South State Street and set up shop in Lieutenant Franklin's office. He had some extra chairs brought in and Shelby, Lieutenant Haley, Rosie O'Grady and Bertha Macaulay listened in while I told my story to the tape recorder that had been set up on his desk.

"To begin with, I think the real reason that Macaulay took me into partnership with him was so he could devote more of his own time to ferreting out things against The Outfit. I did almost all the work of our agency except the desk work. I tell that to prove that I don't think Mac's efforts against The Outfit were a personal vendetta because he held them responsible for getting him off the police force. I think he did it only because he was at heart a cop in the service of the people, even if he was no longer a member of the department." Bertha gave me a thankful smile.

"Starting with last Sunday night. Macaulay and Bob Murtaugh had been working together for some time. Miss Macaulay, working as a singer at the De Luxe, was acting as a spy for them in Dorish's own establishment. Macaulay was trying to gather any evidence he could; Murtaugh, with Miss O'Grady helping him, was primarily interested in tying The Outfit up with the narcotics racket in Chicago. Murtaugh had been tapping some telephones and they had gathered a lot of material, all of which Macaulay had painstakingly written down on the back of the office calendar sheets. He also made carbon copies, which he eventually gave to his daughter in case anything happened to the originals or to him.

"Somewhere in that mass of material Bob Murtaugh must have tumbled to something about Warsaw and Hal Benton and the dope racket.

"Sunday night at the party on the *Osiris*, Hal Benton must have advised Warsaw that he had brought more heroin into Chicago. Warsaw agreed to have the cash ready to pay for it at a certain time.

"Late Sunday night, Benton, not trusting Warsaw too much, and fearing that someone might attempt to get the bowling ball full

of heroin without the formality of paying for it, took the bowling ball ashore to cache it in a bowling locker at the *Bowl*. Bob Murtaugh trailed him and caught him red-handed.

"Benton killed Murtaugh, probably in the alley behind the *Bowl*, transferred his own personal belongings to Murtaugh's body, trussed it up and weighted it and threw it in the river. He didn't expect the body to be found but, if it were, the added impetus for the police to find the killer of a cop would be missing. He also did it because he feared someone besides Murtaugh might have the details of his set-up with Warsaw and it would be best for him to steer clear of Chicago for a long time.

"After disposing of Murtaugh, Benton stored the bowling ball in a *Bowl* locker and carried the key away with him. He then went to Warsaw's place to hide out and wait until Warsaw could rake the necessary cash together to pay for the heroin.

"On Thursday afternoon Warsaw got the money together and paid Benton for the heroin. Benton simply gave Warsaw the key to the locker at the *Bowl*. Warsaw sent Dale Mester and Lou Bergen, with Elio driving them, to the *Bowl* to pick up the bowling bag full of dope.

"But Bill Macaulay had somehow tumbled to their secret. Thursday afternoon he went to the *Bowl*, got the house key and got the bowling ball. His own locker had his own personal padlock on it; so he put Benton's bowling ball in it. Naturally, and this is one of the obvious things we missed; there wasn't any room for his own bowling bag and ball, so he started back to the office with it. It was then that Dale Mester and Lou Bergen showed up with the key. They found the locker empty and they saw Macaulay walking out of the place with one. They put two and two together and gunned Mac. But my unexpected appearance prevented their getting the bag.

"Hal Benton had Warsaw's cash but Warsaw didn't have the bowling ball so Warsaw kept Benton at his place as a prisoner until he did get it. He rather suspected a double-cross. At the same time the story broke in the papers about Macaulay's coming appearance before the Crime Committee.

"So Warsaw not only had to recover the bowling ball but he also had to find Macaulay's evidence before it could wind up in the

hands of the Crime Committee. He had a two-way problem on his hands, and he was looking for a quick solution.

"That explains their search of the office and of my rooms and also why Ella Granger staged her amourous interlude with me.

"Then Mel Brennan came into the picture. He had once been associated with The Outfit; and he also knew Macaulay pretty well. He had himself, driven by revenge for being dropped by The Outfit, promised to testify before the Crime Committee. He was the first to suspect that Miss Betty Conroy was really Bertha Macaulay and that Macaulay might give her a copy of the written evidence. He stole it from her hiding place, and then had the foolish idea that he could peddle it to Warsaw and still remain alive.

"After first dragging me into the thing so as to provide him with an obvious alibi and laying down his actor's idea of fear, Warsaw murdered Brennan. He dumped the gun and the carbon copy of the evidence into the trash barrel on Canal Street, where it was picked up by Dale Mester and taken to a prearranged rendezvous. Dale Mester also got the idea that Warsaw was a soft touch for blackmail and tried to put the bite on him. Warsaw obliged by killing Mester and trying to frame him with both the murder of Macaulay and Brennan.

"The next move was to snatch Miss Macaulay and use her as bait to draw me to a showdown. He was willing to trade her safety for the bowling ball. The whole gang expected to hold us prisoners only long enough to enable them to flee the country. Dorish mentioned an island off the coast of South America. The rest of the story I think you know."

Franklin said, "Warsaw was taking a hell of a chance. What if you had tumbled to his idea and instead of going to his place alone, brought the cops?"

"Warsaw, different from Dorish in many ways, was like him in one respect. He didn't give cops or private eyes credit for any brains at all. They thought they were infallible; had all the brains. And besides, Warsaw knew one thing. He knew I was head over heels in love with Bertha Macaulay and would go through hell and high water to get her if she were in danger." I gave her my best lopsided grin.

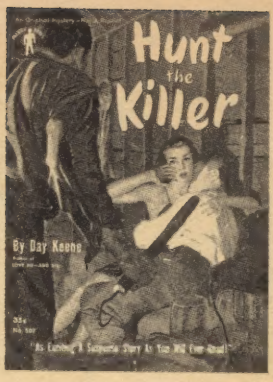
She squeezed my hand. "Let's go home," she said, and got up

and gave me a smile that squeezed my heart with pride. "I've got some evidence, too. You just said it on a tape recorder. Let's go, darling."

Outside she said, "One thing I'd like more information on. About that 'amourous interlude with Ella Granger? How far did you go?"

I grinned. "Just far enough," I said.

THE END.



WANTED FOR MURDER!

"Night was long in coming. When it did come, I crawled out of the swamp and made my way, cautiously, back to the shore. No one tried to stop me . . . I walked to the house and sat on the steps. I'd been all right while it was still daylight. Now I was beginning to panic, to start at sounds. I wasn't afraid of the dark. I was afraid of what might come out of it. . . . Ken knew I was on the island. Alone. For some reason Ken hated me. For some reason, he'd made the manhunt personal. Was it because of Beth? Or was there another reason? But of one thing I was sure . . . Ken wanted to empty his gun in my guts!"

• • •

Violence and savage emotions run the gamut in this powerful suspense novel by Day Keene. No holds are barred, no punches pulled as Keene takes you on a relentless manhunt, spiked by dangerous women, desperate men — and death!

ANOTHER ORIGINAL
PHANTOM MYSTERY

SUSPENSE! MYSTERY!

INTRIGUE!

NAKED PASSION!

You will find them all in

HUNT THE KILLER!

ON SALE AT YOUR FAVORITE NEWSSTAND!

OTHER PHANTOM SUSPENSE MYSTERIES ON SALE AT YOUR NEWSSTAND!

- **HOMICIDE HOTEL**... No. 500
- **KISSES CAN KILL**... No. 501
- **THE DEADLY LOVER**... No. 502
- **MARRIED TO MURDER**... No. 503
- **LOVE ME —AND DIE!**... No. 504
- **SATAN'S WIDOW**... No. 505

HE FLIRTED WITH DEATH!

"Her hand touched the metal of my holstered gun and she withdrew in shock . . . I put it on the ledge behind the table . . . I went back to the davenport and she uttered a low moan and reached up to me. She put her lips on mine and pulled me toward her . . . Suddenly she relaxed and lay back . . . Something cold and hard was pressed into the middle of my back . . . And then a man's voice said, 'Damn you!' . . . I didn't hear anything else. The gun butt slammed down on my skull. Pain rocked my head and I felt my body roll off the davenport . . . I was conscious of voices before I drifted into blackness. . . ."

CRIME ON MY HANDS
is an original
Phantom Suspense Mystery